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AMAZING ANC STORIES



SOMEWHERE I'LL FIND YOU!

By **STEPHEN MARLOWE**

When they stole his girl, Langdon battled multiple worlds!



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Some feared him as a *Demon*. To others he was the superstition of an age gone by. But he came into the World bearing the greatest Treasure in history and dared his victims to accept it.

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By **James S. Wallerstein**

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Demon's Mirror.

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The

OBSERVATORY

..... by the Editor

LAST month a quiet-type young man walked into our editorial offices and said something like, "Remember me?" Did we! A couple of chairs and the department secretary got themselves trampled on in our hurry to circle the desk, shake the young man's hand and welcome him back to the fold. His name? Don Wilcox!

AFTER the "how-you-been's" and "what-d'ya-doin'-these-days" were out of the way, we got down to business. "Doing any writing, Don?" "Some. Ghosted a couple of books and some articles. Right now I'm working on a novel of my own." "No science fiction?" "Well, no. I've been away from the field several years now." "How come, Don? Not tired of it, are you?" "Certainly not! Just too much else to do."

THAT was the cue we had been waiting for. A prearranged signal, devised for just such an emergency, was flashed; and a couple of minutes later Leo Summers, our act editor, happened to stroll casually into the office, a cover painting under his arm. "Got something here I thought you'd like to see," he told us, pointedly ignoring our visitor. He held the cover up so only we could see it.

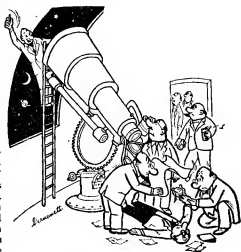
ACTUALLY, the painting had been around the office for several days; but we never let on. Don was doing his best to catch a glimpse of the subject matter without being too obvious about it. After letting his curiosity get thoroughly hooked, we swung it carelessly around and said, "How d'ya like it, pal?"

HE LIKED it. Anyone interested in science fiction, reader or author, couldn't help but like it. And we knew that running through his mind was the memory of the many, many times he had sat across the desk from your editor and stared at a new cover while his writer's mind began to shape a story to fit it. Nothing was said for several minutes, then he looked up from the painting and caught our grin. "You win," he said. "How long should it run and how soon do you want it?" Don Wilcox was back in the fold.

AND that's how we're able to announce A that very soon now you'll be reading a 25,000 word novel by one of science-fiction's most able and popular authors—a novel in the tradition of "The Voyage that Lasted 600 Years" and "Disciples of Destiny." Don't let it get past you unread!

ODDS and Ends About This and That: A card from Frank Robinson, back in the Navy, from Casablanca, complaining that the town is a far cry from the movie by the same name.... Highly recommended is 20th-Century-Fox's "The Day the World Stood Still." As good as Hollywood has done in the field of science fiction—and far better than most.... H.B. Hickey, who writes too few stories to get him the recognition he deserves, runs a retail business in Southern California.... The only fly in the Nolacon, we hear tell, was the insufferable heat and humidity....

NEXT month you'll be reading Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s great 40,000 word novel in these pages. You'll really enjoy every word of it! —HB



"It's a caterpillar, boys!"

AMAZING STORIES

DECEMBER, 1951

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All **STORIES** *Complete*

SCOMEWHERE I'LL FIND YOU! (Short novel—26,000) by Stephen Marlowe 6

Illustrated by Lawrence

Somewhere in the myriad parallel worlds was a lovely Earth girl. It was Ed's job to rescue her—even though the science and knowledge of a Universa opposed him!

THE LITTLE CREEPS (Novelette—15,000) by Walter M. Miller, Jr. 56

Illustrated by L. R. Summers

General Horrey's bible was Klausewitz, his church the Pentagon. You don't push that kind of officer around—even if you're an alien race with unlimited power!

RETURN ENGAGEMENT (Short—6,000) by H. B. Hickey 86

Illustrated by Ralph Castenir

When Earth and Venus played that all-important football game, the winning coach expected the fruits of victory to be served on the gridiron—not on a platter!

THE HATCHETMAN (Novelette—16,500) by Meek Reynolds and Fredric Brown... 96

Illustrated by Ed. Valigursky

Matt Anders' chief difficulty in this war between worlds wasn't to separate the sheep from the goats; it was making sure the goats didn't multiply like rabbits!

CHECKMATE FOR ARADJO (Novelette—10,000) by Rog Phillips 126

Illustrated by Virgil Finlay and Leo Ramon Summers

Aradjo, Earth's chess champion, set out to prove the way to prevent war was to hand the aggressor the best possible weapon—then dare him to pull the trigger!

Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jonas, illustrating

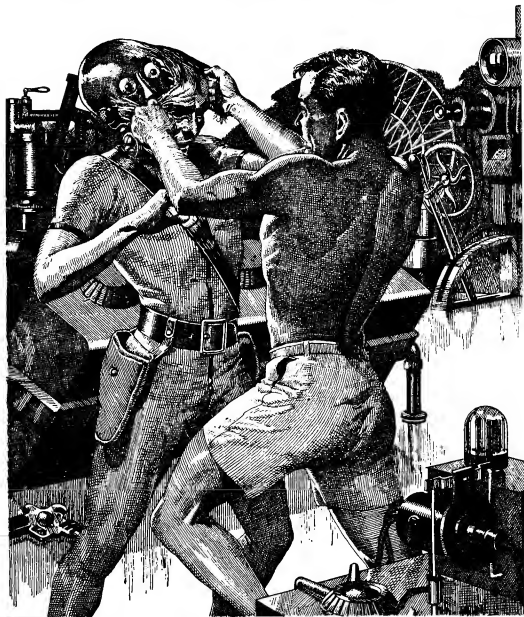
a scene from the story "Somewhere I'll Find You!"

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SOMEWHERE I'LL FIND YOU!

By Stephen Marlowe

Snatching Ed's girl was bad enough; but when the little men told him she had no right to be born—he really blew his top!



Langdon's groping fingers, seeking Utgard's eyes, found yielding skin instead. A savage wrench—and the man's entire face collapsed!



A BEER commercial lit up the television screen at ten-thirty. Ed Langdon remembered that much distinctly. On either side of him sat Bob Hendrix and his wife—plump and pretty Judy to his right, Bob to his left. Everything was very clear. Except that things started to go crazy right after that.

Because she didn't particularly like television, Freya sat off to one side, her back to the big nineteen-inch screen, her blonde beauty distracting Langdon completely, her radiant smile saying better than any words, *We'll be married in a week, darling...*

That's what she thought. That's what Langdon thought. No one would have denied it, not even Freya's affable giant of a brother, Torstein Haugland, who liked surprise endings in everything from television to magazines to real life. For Tor liked Ed Langdon even more, and probably now he was busy telling all his friends at the Norwegian Sailors' Home in Brooklyn what a fine young brother-in-law he'd be getting, even if the lad didn't have Viking blood in his veins.

But at ten-thirty-one—Langdon remembered the time because the announcer had predicted a one-minute commercial—things went crazy.

The beer commercial flared up brilliantly, so brilliantly that you couldn't see the commercial at all. Instead, a bright light pulsed on the screen, throwing its glow across the room.

A droning sound unlike any television disturbance Langdon had ever heard rumbled up from somewhere deep within the mahogany console.

Judy Hendrix said, "Bob dear, we'll have to get a repair man in the morning."

Her husband did not answer. He yelped instead.

The nineteen-inch screen shattered. Flying shards of glass shot out in all directions, one sliver grazing Langdon's forehead and cutting a deep gash.

Something *zipped* out from the shattered tube, a gleaming teardrop no bigger than your index finger when it first appeared. In a fraction of a second it passed just overhead between Judy and Freya, and by then it was bigger than a baseball bat.

It grew.

By the time it reached the far wall it was as big as a good-sized bathtub, only it didn't look like a bathtub at all.

Langdon had visited the Planetarium, had seen what spaceships might one day look like. The thing which exploded from the Hendrix television set could have been a pint-sized spaceship, with peaked prow, stubby wings and a cabin from which Langdon thought he saw three heads peering.

The gleaming blue tear-drop came to rest at the far wall, exhaust smoke curling lazily from a bank of tubes at its rear. Judy whimpered softly, her auburn head slumped down over her chest. Tall and superbly formed, Freya stood with hands on hips, surveying the thing. Hendrix looked at Langdon, Langdon looked back at his host, shrugged foolishly. "What the hell," he said, "let's see what that contraption is."

He got up and strode across the room, a lithe, athletic figure of a man, six-foot-two and broad of shoulder, yet carrying himself with the effortless grace of a jungle cat. Like his wife, Hendrix was built along stubbier lines, and he didn't seem in any great hurry to poke his nose around the miniature spaceship. Langdon reached it first—and a door in its gleaming hull popped open.

THREE FIGURES stepped out jauntily, alighting on the floor. Langdon squinted down at them in the dim glow of the television lamp. He'd have accepted three little bug-eyed horrors more readily. Each no more than a foot long, the figures were tiny men!

Briefly, Langdon stood in the way, and neither Freya nor Hendrix could see the spaceship's occupants. By the time Langdon moved aside, the figures made like their spaceship.

They grew—and grew.

They did not stop until they had attained normal proportions, each one nattily attired in a bright orange uniform. They waited patiently for the metamorphosis to take place, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

One looked around, scratching his bare head. "Uh-huh, this is the place. Third Level world—"

Langdon failed to hear the rest of it. Judy stood up, took one quick look at the three men. She screamed before she fell to the high-pile carpet in a dead faint.

The first of the three figures seemed utterly unperturbed. He took a white card from his pocket, read it briefly, jabbed a gloved finger at Langdon's chest. "Which one of the women is Freya Haugland?"

"I'll answer that when you tell me who the devil you are." Langdon did not feel nearly as brave as he sounded. More than anything else, he felt stunned. But that seemed the thing to say, despite the fact that he'd have preferred a good stiff shot of whiskey. Men just don't come popping out of television screens in little spaceships. Men who grow bigger right before your eyes. Only they did—

"Please! Which one is Freya Haugland?"

"I said—"

But Freya came forward, taking her stand beside Langdon. "I'm Freya."

"But of course. Your Scandinavian ancestry certainly asserts itself. Well, come along."

"What do you mean 'come along'?" Langdon bristled, stepping between Freya and the orange-uniformed man.

BY THEN, Hendrix had regained some of his lost composure. With the help of a glass of cold water, he'd revived Judy, who sat on the floor with her legs crossed under her, slight-

ly dissheveled. Now he said, "See here! If this is some kind of an advertising stunt—if it is, I'm going to call the police."

"My friend, does it look like an advertising stunt?"

Freya smiled. "You never know what's liable to come out of a television screen. But it sure looks more complicated than an advertising stunt—"

"I'll say," Judy chimed in. "They ruined our television—" And then she started to blubber again.

The second orange-uniformed man said: "We're getting nowhere fast, Captain Adams. May I suggest that we take the woman and go?"

"Naturally. But it is a bit awkward. We were supposed to come upon her alone, not in the company of three other people."

"What's the difference? If they tell what they've seen, who will believe them?"

"Umm-mm," Captain Adams considered. "A good point. All right then. You guard these three while I take the woman."

"If I may suggest, sir, while we get smaller they might try—"

"Again a good point. Very well, then—paralyze them."

Langdon had listened in silent disbelief to the dialogue, but now he began, "Listen, you—"

He stayed that way, mouth open, ready to form the next word. The second orange-uniformed man had removed a slim metal tube from his belt, had pointed it first at Langdon, then at Hendrix, at Judy, and finally at Freya.

Langdon could not move a muscle!

He strove mightily, but he could not even move his little finger. He could only stand there and watch while the third uniformed figure slung Freya over his shoulder like a big beautiful

rag doll. After that, the three figures commenced to shrink.

And Freya with them...

Langdon could not blink his eyes, which began to sting and tear. Dimly, he was aware of four-foot-long figures entering the little blue ship, the fourth one a tiny immobile statue which had been Freya.

The door swung shut. The ship shuddered, rose off the floor—began to shrink.

A TINY mote again, it plunged back within the television tube and disappeared. Nothing remained to remind them of the visit but the shattered screen. Not even their paralysis, which disappeared abruptly with the ship.

Hendrix's fingers shook too much, and he dropped the cigarette on a table after two unsuccessful attempts to light it. "You want me to call the police, Ed?"

"What for? What'll we tell them, that a little ship blew in out of the television set and took Freya?"

Judy bent over and peered within the shattered screen. "I don't see anything," she admitted. "Don't worry, Ed; it's probably somebody's idea of a big joke. Hah-hah..." Her laughter trailed off, lamely.

"I still say the police," Hendrix persisted. "Look, Ed—you don't want to play around with a thing like this—"

"Damn it, don't you think I know that?"

"Hey, take it easy—"

"I'm...sorry, Bob. But they took Freya, just like that. Where or why, we don't know. Neither will the police. They'll ask a lot of pointless questions, waste a lot of time, bury us in heaps of red tape.... No, we don't want the police."

"What can you do?"

"I don't know. I don't know! Maybe if I told Tor—"

"You mean Freya's brother Torstein? Yeah, he's quite a guy. I've never seen anything he couldn't handle when he really set his mind to it. And what an imagination!"

"Yes, Torstein," Langdon mused, liking his idea better every moment. He crossed into the foyer, picked the phone off its cradle, dialed information. "I'd like the number of the Norwegian Sailors' Home in Brooklyn. What? No, my directory isn't handy! Uh-huh, thanks."

He dialed the number, waited. Then: "Hello? I'd like you to page Torstein Haugland. Haugland, H-a-u-g-l-a-n-d! Yes, it's important. I'll wait...."

"Tor? Yeah, Ed. I've got to see you at once.... You're damned right it sounds like a matter of life and death! ... Sure, take a cab. I'd ask you to fly if you could.... Right."

Langdon lit a cigarette and paced back and forth. Three quarters of an hour before he could expect Torstein to arrive from Brooklyn. But what could Torstein do? What could any one do? Well, it was a final straw to grasp and he knew he'd feel a lot better when Tor's giant figure squeezed in through the apartment doorway.

SIX AND a half feet of Torstein Haugland joined Langdon in his pacing, topped by gaunt, rugged features, icy blue eyes and a blond crew cut. "So that's your story," Torstein grunted finally, after Langdon had finished talking. Even as Tor said it, Langdon realized how ridiculous it all sounded, and he half-expected Torstein to burst out laughing. But the Norseman took it all very seriously.

"Ed, if it weren't you, and if the girl it happened to weren't our Freya—"

"What then?"

"I think I would squash your face a little for making me run all the way up here."

"Well, do you believe me?"

"You ask a man to believe a lot, with no proof beyond a smashed television set."

"Do you believe me?"

"Ed... yes! But that's not important. We've got to get Freya back. You know I would die for my sister."

"You talk like you know where she is."

"I didn't say that. But I know—something." Torstein stopped his pacing long enough to tamp the bowl of his pipe full of tobacco and light it. He sighed, blew a great cloud of smoke to the ceiling, muttered, "Freya, Freya," under his breath.

Then he said, "Ed, may I tell you a story? Good! Years ago, when Freya was just a little sapling, not the tall strong maiden of the valkyrie that she now is, she had dreams. Night after night they came, not the sort of dreams which may strike the mind of any youngster, but wild, impossible nightmares. Little Freya would wake up red-eyed and screaming, and it would be long before my mother—may the Lord rest her soul—could croon her back to sleep.

"Now, at that time there lived with us in the Fjordland an old hag, my mother's cousin's great-grandmother. Old she was, so old that all had lost count of the year. She would shake her shaggy gray head and grin her toothless grin and we would all listen, for she was what the Indians of this country would call a shaman. I won't pretend that she had any ancient wisdom that is lost to this generation, Ed. I don't know.

"BUT I DO know this. She claimed that ancient wisdom, whatever it was, for her own. And whenever little Freya had her dreams, the hag could quiet her. 'Dream no more, my child,' she would say, and then Freya

could sleep the sleep a babe is meant to have. And there by the fire while the winds howled in among the fjords outside, the hag would talk of another world, of many worlds as far removed from this one as the farthest star, and yet not removed at all.

"One day soon after Spring had come to the Fjordland with the fresh smell of growing things, Freya disappeared. She—"

"What? Did you say she disappeared? Like this time?"

"I don't know. The *áurora* was on that night, I remember, bouncing lances of fire from crag to crag down by the sea. And Freya... vanished. Without a trace, Ed.

"For two weeks she was gone. My mother wept, the whole village wept, for little Freya was beloved of all. Only the hag did not weep, the hag who perhaps loved Freya more than us all. She said our worry was foolishness. She said—but I do not recollect too well, because I was no more than ten. Anyway, after a fortnight, the old hag joined Freya. Without warning, she vanished. And perhaps the queerest thing of all was this: the *aurora* had returned to the Fjordland!

"We never saw the hag again. But a few days later, thunder and lightning rocked our village, a very unusual thing in the Fjordland in early Spring. When the storm subsided, we found Freya sound asleep in her bed..."

"That's all?" Langdon demanded.

"All that matters. Soon after, we left the spot as a place cursed by devils, by Loki's brood or worse. We came here to America, and nothing like that ever happened to Freya again. Until what you just told me. Freya remembered nothing of it; she was only three. I am the last alive perhaps who knows, because my father took ill and died on the crossing, and my poor saddened mother fol-

lowed to her reward soon after that."

"You say you're the last. What about the old woman, the hag?"

TORSTEIN shrugged. "Ah, what about her! Who knows, who can say? I only know that while we lived in the Fjordland she never came back. It was as if she had substituted herself for little Freya—wherever Freya went—to a world as far as the farthest star, yet not distant at all, as the hag would say. As for her—I don't know. Perhaps, after all, she has returned to the Fjordland. Perhaps she lives there even now, a hundred years old if she is a day. Perhaps she is dead. Perhaps...well, wherever she went, if the place wanted one and she traded herself for Freya..." Torstein spread his hands out eloquently enough.

Judy Hendrix frowned. "If you don't mind my saying so, Mr. Haugland, it sounds a little cockeyed."

Her husband did some frowning of his own, but Torstein chuckled softly. "We live in a cockeyed world, Mrs. Hendrix. Not many years ago, a cousin of mine went with some men across the Pacific Ocean on some logs to prove a theory. That is cockeyed, but it also is wonderful. Who is to say what is crazy and what is not?"

Getting some glasses and pouring drinks for all, Hendrix said, "I'll swallow that. But even assuming there's some connection between what happened when Freya was a girl and what happened now, what can you do about it?"

Torstein slapped his palm down hard on his thigh. "We can go to the Fjordland and find out, that's what! I can sail in a week on a Norwegian freighter, and I know the company well enough to see that Ed books on with me as a deck hand. That is, if you want to, Ed—"

"If I want to! I want Freya, Tor. I

want to know she's safe, I want her in my arms where she belongs, I want— Listen! Why wait a week? If I take the money I saved for our honeymoon, we can fly BOAC to London, and from there to Oslo. We can step off in your Fjordland tomorrow!"

"Your savings, all your savings—"

"So what? They were for Freya and me. They are still for Freya and me. Shall I call the airline terminal, Tor?"

Torstein stood up and banged the ashes from his pipe. More to himself than to anyone in the room, he mumbled, "The Fjordland after all these years. And Freya...little Freya whom we must find." He placed a huge hand on Langdon's shoulder, looked for a long moment into the eyes of the man who would be his brother-in-law.

"Call them."

NORWAY. LATE afternoon of the next day, they stepped out of the airliner in Oslo, a crisp, clear early-Spring day. Torstein had wired ahead and a tall, angular man with the bluest eyes Langdon had ever seen met them at the administration building.

"You are little Torstein!" he cried tremulously in English, embracing the Norse giant. "Ah, but you are not so little any more. I would know you anywhere."

Torstein smiled. "It has been a long time, Uncle Leif. This is Ed Langdon, who would marry a Haugland woman."

"Our Freya," the old man said, pumping Langdon's hand warmly. "And how is she? Tall and strong and beautiful as the mists that rise up from the Fjords on a good Spring morning, I'll wager. Tell me, lads, how is she?"

Torstein said solemnly, "It is because of Freya that we came to Norway. I suggest that you take us someplace where we may drink and talk. But first answer a question: you remember the ancient hag, Olaf Erick-

son's great-grandmother I believe she was?"

"Of course I remember her—the cackler!"

"Is she here, in the Fjordland?"

"No, lad. She's not. She never returned after that day, long ago when—"

"I know what day you mean, Uncle. Yesterday Freya vanished again, and now there is no hag to bring her back...."

Leif Haugland swallowed hard, his Adam's apple bobbing up and down. "I think we'd better find that place to drink," he said, while Torstein and Ed got their luggage.

It was several hours of hard driving from Oslo to the northern Fjordland, with the small fishing villages flashing by one after the other. A stiff breeze blew in from the sea and low, fleecy clouds scudded along the horizon, sparkling like a string of pearls against the deep blue sky.

When old Lief Haugland pulled the car off the macadam road and drove for a time along a winding dirt path, Torstein was amazed. "But where's our village?" he demanded.

"Didn't you know, Tor? When the hag failed to return, the villagers left the spot, their simple souls thinking of curses and the Elder Gods. Left alone for twenty years on the Fjordland, a village does not stand unchanged. Look now...."

THE SITE of the deserted village swept from the road down to the sea, but nature had encroached everywhere, leaving only a few scattered huts in one piece. Walls had disappeared as if by magic, hardly a roof still stood, cobbled streets were broken and torn.

"We had the pride of the village," Torstein sighed. "A stone cottage. Surely it yet stands?"

"I think so," his uncle admitted, driving their car down one of the narrow cobbled roads that twisted its way between the fallen, broken huts. "There, you see?"

Alone of all the village, the neat stone cottage by the sea had withstood the fury of the elements. Now it waited for them, silently, as if it had been only yesterday that a bright fire roared on its hearth, sending a cheery curl of smoke out against the sky.

"What a world we live in!" Torstein mused. "All that red tape yesterday, Ed, so you could get us here with official sanction from the two governments. And today—what is government, what is all the red tape and politics and science of the world? Today we stand in the Fjordland, near a cottage where I was born, where Freya... Freya..."

The door squeaked open on its rusty hinges and a musty smell greeted them from within the cottage. "Here we sat by the hearth," said Torstein, "while the old hag wove stories of the old days and the olden magic, and here—" opening another door "—here I slept in this bed with little Freya in the next room. See? Sometimes I remember our mother would stand in the doorway and croon to both of us at once."

Ed cleared his throat impatiently. "I know you have your memories, Tor, and I don't like to intrude. But we came because Freya—"

Torstein shrugged, peered from a window. Outside, the sun was falling below the horizon, turning the fleecy clouds to scarlet fire. "Don't you think I know that, Ed? I am thinking.... Yes! There was a place here that the hag had for her very own, and no one in all the village could go near it. Often we heard rumbling noises, and as children we were frightened. In the cellar, come."

THEY OPENED a trap door in what had been the living room, and before they went down the rickety wooden stairs, Leif Haugland ran out to the car and returned with a flashlight. Soon the light cut a swath for them through the inky darkness and they poked around curiously in the damp place. From somewhere, water seeped down slowly. It must have trickled in like that over the years, for the stone floor was covered with a thick carpet of moss.

Said Leif Haugland, "Would you think me a fool if I told you I was frightened? Even when I was a child—and that is a long time ago, Tor, Edward—even then, the hag seemed old as time itself, and she went about her mysterious way frightening all the children, and the adults as well—What was that?"

"By the Elder Gods now, will you relax?" Torstein chuckled. "I merely scraped my foot against the wall, Uncle." Then he grunted, playing the light along the far wall. "What have we here?"

"It looks like a lever," Ed told him, padding across the moss and examining the huge metal arm which protruded from what looked like a shield hanging on the wall. "But what for?"

Torstein grunted again, touching the thing with his fingers. "This is steel, I think. But what is steel doing down here in this ancient place? And that thing on the wall—it's no shield, Ed. Here, try to move it."

Ed nodded, grabbing the edge of the shield and tugging. He pulled with all his strength, pulled until the veins stood out on his forehead, but he did not move the shield-like slab of metal one inch.

Torstein ran a hand through his short thatch of blond hair. "Now that lever, maybe the lever moves."

His Uncle placed a trembling hand

on the giant's forearm. "Naturally, Torstein. That is what levers are for, to move. But this one, must you move this one?"

"Apparently the hag used this thing, long and long ago. We're here for just that reason, Uncle, to see what powers she had. If you want to run upstairs like a craven—"

"Hold your tongue!" the old man cried. "I was a captain in the Norwegian Navy before you were born! I merely joked...." He sighed and then stood there, waiting for Torstein to make the next move.

TORSTEIN took the lever between his two hands and yanked at it. He yanked again, and this time furiously. In the light of their flash, rust flaked off and settled on his forearms like the plague, but the lever failed to stir.

"See?" Leif Haugland told them. "The hag could move this thing because she knew its magic. But you cannot, Tor. Perhaps if we leave now and return later with the tools we need—"

"Quiet, Uncle! No hag with all the magic in this world and others is stronger than Torstein Haugland. No...."

If anyone else had said that, Ed knew, it would have sounded mildly ridiculous. But Torstein made that declaration quite seriously, and no one thought it was funny.

"...not that all all," Torstein was saying. "Rust has made this thing stiff, that is all. Ed, if you'll lend a hand—"

Together they grasped the stubborn metal arm, and Ed crouched, his knees bent, the muscles on his back flexed, until Torstein shouted, "Heave!" Then they were pulling at the thing together, while old Leif Haugland stood off in a corner, holding the flashlight and muttering to himself.

It wasn't doing any good, Ed thought. The metal arm could have been part of the wall for all their tugging. Besides, what on Earth could they expect to happen, even if they succeeded in activating the ancient machinery....?

Abruptly, with a loud scraping sound, the lever came down a full two feet.

Something clanged and rumbled and Ed got the impression that it was far, far away. After that, only their harsh breathing cut through the utter silence.

Something whispered over and over again in Ed's mind: *go upstairs, upstairs...*

"Let's get out of here!" Torstein roared. And when Ed nodded: "Oh, you hear it too, eh? Come on!"

The three of them clambered up the rickety stairs, stalked through the living room and out into the gathering night.

DESPITE THE final flickerings of sunset, the aurora already had come to the Fjordland. It formed a great canopy of wild, pulsing light across the sky, hiding the stars and the crescent moon. Lances of light touched each other playfully, crashed together with silent thunder, darting and twisting and eluding one another in a game which belonged to the Elder Gods.

"By the brood of Loki!" Leif Haugland cried passionately. "I've never seen it like that before! And this so early in the evening."

"I wonder," said Torstein. "I wonder. Did pulling that lever have anything to do with the aurora— Hello, what's that?"

A bright note seemed to detach itself from the flashing canopy and then plunge Earthward like a shooting star. Down it came and down, and when its brief glowing faded away,

something had alighted near their old automobile.

Torstein took the flashlight from his uncle's nerveless fingers and played its beam toward the car. "Loki's brood is right," he said.

"Hold it steady," Ed pleaded. "Yeah, like that. I'll be damned!" Together, they ran forward, and Ed was half aware that Leif Haugland hung back near the stone cottage by himself, trembling and afraid.

A blue ship like the one which had come through Bob Hendrix's television set rested idly not half a dozen steps from their car!

Ed examined its smooth blue surface curiously, not even thinking that the impossible had happened again. You accepted something like this, or you went off your rocker trying to ponder the reasons for it. And overhead, the aurora began to fade from the sky, as if it had come with but one purpose, and that to deliver the ship....

"I'd like to go inside," Torstein said. "I'd very much like to do that."

"How can we? First place, there's no opening I can see. Also, it's too small, maybe as big as a good-sized barrel, that's all."

"No—look. It's growing!"

It was, or that's what Ed thought at first. But then, so was the old car, the cottage, the nearby trees, even a now-monstrous Leif Haugland who had crept forward to watch.

Ed felt oddly removed from the whole affair. It couldn't be happening to him, not this. And so when he spoke it was in a very level voice. He said, "That thing isn't growing, Tor. We're *shrinking!*"

Leif Haugland shouted something, but his voice came out too deep for them to hear. If they stood next to him, Ed realized, they'd hardly reach up to his knees. The blue ship had be-

come huge, as large as the BOAC Constellation which had taken them across the Atlantic. Something big and brown and hairy brushed against Ed's shin and he kicked at it, watching it scamper away. A beetle—

At that moment, a door in the side of the blue hull popped open, exactly as it had done in the Hendrix apartment. Ed smiled grimly. "You've got your wish, Tor. Let's go!" But he thought: *maybe this will take me to Freya.*

THEY STEPPED through the portal, into a square cubicle about half the size of the cottage living room, relative to their new proportions. Several panels glowed dully in its walls, casting a feeble illumination which was sufficient to show them that the cubicle was empty. No furniture. No instrument panel. Just a bare room. Off to one side, up near the ceiling, a row of windows broke the wall's smooth surface. And that was all.

Torstein shrugged. "I guess we just wait for something to happen." Then, an instant later: "Lord, what was that?"

Something huge and watery and blue had flashed briefly by the row of windows.

"I'd say that was your Uncle Leif," Ed told him. "Or that is, his eye. Probably he looked in through those windows."

"Yes!" Torstein cried. "And that means we're still shrinking, but along with the ship now. You remember, you said it got very small before it went back into the television tube."

A stirring came from someplace beneath their feet, deep within the core of the ship. Bank after bank of machinery might reside below them and all around them. Ed couldn't tell; the four walls of their little cubicle effectively blocked them from everything

else.

Especially when the door snapped shut with complete mutely, and when the panel lights winked out....

Standing in total darkness, Ed reached into his pocket for a crumpled pack of cigarettes, took one out, lit it, relieved by the brief flare of the match before it too went out.

"I generally smoke a pipe," Torstein whispered. "But better give me one of those, Ed. I think we're moving."

Ed didn't have time to reply, could not even find the strength to light Torstein's cigarette. Gravity crushed them down helplessly against the floor as the ship gained acceleration. Crushed harder, flattened them, pounded in Ed's ears, took the ability to see from his eyes—

The last thing he remembered was Torstein's muttering, "Maybe that—old—hag wasn't—a fake—a f i e r all...."

Then the aurora flashed in all its brilliance, this time inside his head.

"AMAZING!" TORSTEIN said. "No broken bones."

Ed got to his feet groggily, leaned heavily on Torstein's arm for support, then backed away. "The door is open, Tor. How long have you been up?"

"I don't know. Twenty minutes, maybe half an hour. Wherever we went, we've arrived. The door was ajar as soon as I opened my eyes. And you shou'd see it outside, really nice. Just like a park."

"You been out?"

"Hell, no. I want to find Freya just as much as you do, but I think wherever we are, the two of us can do a lot better than one. I hope it isn't a fight we'll have on our hands, Ed. Between us we haven't got as much as a toothpick. No knives, no gun. Nothing. Shall we go?"

"Yeah, sure." Ed bit his lip. "Where on Earth can we be?"

"Friend, if you think we're on Earth, you've got less of an imagination than I thought—"

"I didn't mean it that way. Just an expression, Tor. If we're still on Earth, I'd be plenty surprised. But where...."

Torstein muttered something about there being only one way to find out, and then they crossed to the door.

They climbed out of the ship and into a park.

A fountain bubbled gayly nearby. Birds chattered overhead, calling to one another. Small, stunted trees stood about on all sides, neatly groomed, each one clustered with giant, sweet-smelling purple blossoms.

Torstein laughed. "If I were old Leif, I'd say Valhalla."

"If you were yourself, you mean, you superstitious old—"

And then Ed shut up, fast. Someone ambled up the tiled path toward them, a well-built young man in a bright orange uniform.

"Where'd you check in from?" he demanded. "Oh, you just got here?" Then, when he was met with blank stares: "You haven't checked in yet? Say, where are your uniforms?"

"As you can plainly see," said Torstein, "we haven't got any. What is this place?"

"What is this place! By the dimensional gods, who are you two? Colonel Utgard must hear of this. Will you join me, please?"

Did the simple question veil a threat? Ed couldn't tell. He cast a questioning glance at Torstein, who merely shrugged and followed the uniformed figure. Ed looked once behind him at the strange blue ship, which now had assumed a size in logical proportion to the surrounding landscape. Well, at least they seemed to be done

with this size-changing. Ed fell into stride beside Torstein and followed the man in orange.

For perhaps five minutes they walked through the park, the man ahead of them cutting across easily from one twisting path to another.

THEY ENTERED a broad plaza, crossed it to a low rambling structure with gleaming white walls and a terrace girding its middle some twenty feet overhead. Ed saw several other orange-uniformed men idling about the plaza, saw more of them when, with Torstein and their guide, he had entered the white building. Frowning, Ed found himself wondering if Freya had trod this same path the day before.

Inside the building, they climbed one flight of stairs and came out in a bright hallway. Off to the left should be the terrace. And to the right were a row of doors, all shut, each bearing a name prefixed by a military rank. They stopped in front of one marked: COLONEL L. UTGARD, *Director, Inter-Level Relations*

In English. Everything in English, with the possible exception of Colonel Utgard's name. But the names on the other doors: Peters and Smith and Wanewright and Clarke.

Just where the devil were they?

"Yes?" the receptionist asked. She stood at a railing inside the office looking them over curiously. She wore a trim, tailored orange uniform, the sort of masculine outfit which enhances rather than diminishes feminine appeal. And of that, Ed thought briefly, she had plenty.

Their guide told her, "We have no appointment, but this is something unusual, Ma'am."

"Really, Private," the girl said. "You know the Colonel sees no one, except by appointment. I think he's out sunning himself now, anyway.

But, of course, that's confidential between us, eh? Now, would you like to make an appointment? Say, for some time next week?"

"Next week? Will you give the colonel a message for me?"

"Of course."

"Tell him I have reason to believe two men, probably third level, certainly no higher than second, somehow got hold of one of our interval ships and came here in it."

The girl licked her lips, gazed long at Torstein and Ed. "Is that so? Positively incredible, Private. But—wait. I'll see the colonel."

"She doesn't like non-coms," the orange-uniformed man grimaced while they waited. "Well, sometimes women get cocky because they know of the reversal of sex-roles on the Fourth Level, but still..."

In a moment, the girl returned. Their guide saluted her smartly this time, and she smiled vaguely. She said, "Colonel Utgard is annoyed, Private. If what you say is true, you should have had the men exterminated at once, he said. But now that you're here, he'll see them before they're killed."

"Be quiet, Ma'am!" the guard hissed. "They can understand."

"Goodness, you didn't tell me they came from an English-speaking level!"

"Aren't most?"

"Umm-mm, true. Well, come along."

Torstein planted himself firmly and did not move.

Ed told the woman, "I think we'll stay right here, thanks."

But their guard, who until this moment had been a guide, took what could have been a pistol from his belt and said, "No you won't. Come on, move!"

garbed in the inevitable orange uniform. As tall as Ed but not so broad across the shoulders, his dark eyes stared out intently from under a generous brow. He had a straight, handsome nose, but flabby jowls and sensuous lips told of a soft life for all his military bearing.

"These are the men?" he snapped at the woman.

"Yes sir, Colonel."

"All right, you two, let's hear it. That is, if you have anything to say before we send for an extermination squad."

Just like that, as if they were vermin, Ed thought.

Growled Torstein, "You might find us a little hard to exterminate."

"Suppose you let me worry about that. I said, let's hear it."

"He's Torstein Haugland," Ed told the colonel, "and I'm Ed Langdon. One of your blue ships came yesterday and took Freya Haugland, Torstein's sister and my fiancée. We came to get her back."

"Don't just say it, man! How'd you come?"

Ed smiled blandly. There was the rub, he knew, and maybe if they could keep this Colonel Utgard guessing, there'd be no extermination squad. At least, not for a while. "Why," he said, "in our own little blue ship."

"In your—Listen, you idiot, I want the truth!"

"That's the truth. We found a ship and came here."

"No one finds a ship. Who took you? If that decadent Colonel Welcome had anything to do with it..."

"I know no Colonel Welcome. But if you think he's on our side, we'd like to meet him."

Utgard threw his hands up into the air, stalked across the room and prodded the girl's shoulder. "You—fetch me Colonel Welcome!"

COLONEL UTGARD turned out to be a striking figure of a man

"Sir, like you he'll see no one without appointment."

"By the First Level, he'll see me! And tell him I said so."

"Yes sir," she said, a little doubtfully. But she departed on her errand.

She returned in five minutes, and Ed thought she was trying hard to hide a smile. "Sir, Colonel Welcome gives me this message to relay: he is extremely busy, but if you really must see him, you know where to find him."

"Damn that insipid oaf! Damn—very well. We'll all pay a visit to Colonel Welcome."

At Utgard's directions, the guard marched Ed and Torstein out the door.

WELCOME was a little round Colonel whose shining bald dome wouldn't come up to Torstein's shoulders and whose face seemed set in a perpetual jovial grin. "Hello, Utgard," he said after they'd barged into his office. "Just what does the Director of Inter-Level Relations want with me?"

"You're the Third Level expert, aren't you? We've got two specimens from that level, I think."

"So?"

"So I want to know how they got here. Talk!"

"Don't tell me when I can talk, Utgard!" Welcome was still smiling, but his icy tones made the smile meaningless. "You're a colonel, I'm a colonel. I am not one of your subordinates. If you want any information, suppose you fill out the usual form in triplicate."

Utgard turned red, then blanched. "Very well, I'm sorry. But this is the problem, Colonel. Somehow, these two came here. Unauthorized, of course. The penalty always has been and must be extermination. But first, I want to know how they got here."

"That's easy," Ed persisted. "We're

looking for Freya Haugland. A tall blonde girl, very lovely."

Utgard slammed his open palm down on Welcome's desk. "I don't care who you're looking for!"

"Just a moment," Welcome told him, chuckling. "If they came for the Haugland woman, I'm glad. I never approved of the whole thing, anyway."

"You never approved!" Utgard stormed. "That's my responsibility, Welcome, not yours."

"I know it. But now that the case has reached this point, I think I'll call in the Regent for a decision. Do you know what's behind the Haugland case, Colonel?"

"Naturally, naturally. It fell in my department, did it not? Of course, there are so many, and—"

"Then you don't. Simply put, the mistake which placed the Haugland woman from birth on Level Three was utterly without consequences. But since law dictates that all such mistakes must be rectified when discovered, she's been sent to the Fourth Level, where a new life has been prepared for her."

"You mean she's not here?" Torstein demanded.

"Shut up," said Utgard. "Naturally, she had to be sent to Level Four, Welcome. She might alter a Probability Curve, and—"

"That's just what I was trying to say. She'd not be doing that at all, not according to the Logic Division. Only tradition demanded her removal. And I believe it a foolish tradition."

"Don't tell me how to run my division."

"I'm not. I'm merely going to request a decision from the Regent. Meanwhile, I suppose you'd better keep these two confined—"

"No, I'll have them exterminated."

"I'll see that the Regent holds you

responsible if you do. Until he makes a decision, these two are prisoners of the State."

"I refuse!"

"Very well," Welcome smiled, "you give me no choice. We're in my quarters now, Utgard, remember that. I'll keep the prisoners, and you'll see them step toward the little round man, but again when the Regent summons us."

Thoroughly angered, Utgard took a step toward the little round man, but two guards stood between them. Utgard snorted once, then turned on his heel and left the room. The girl followed him, smiling lightly, but the guide who found the men from Level Three looked very pale.

The flesh on his cheeks bounced merrily as Colonel Welcome chuckled. "I really enjoyed that. But did you two know you were very close to death?"

"I got that impression," Torstein admitted dryly.

"**L**ET ME say that I'm quite amazed," Colonel Welcome told them two hours later, as they entered the Regent's quarters. "He must think it terribly important. A summons within two hours. Are you two frightened?"

"Maybe we would be," Ed admitted, "if we knew what was going on."

Colonel Utgard sat there fuming, worrying his lower lip between sharp white teeth. Two dozen uniformed officials sat around him, mostly men. Far off at the end of the long silent hall, the Regent paced back and forth, a wrinkled, white-haired little man in his seventies.

The whole scene appeared theatrical, almost like a movie set from some fantastic epic, with the bright, mirrored columns supporting an arched roof high overhead, with the scores of guards standing stiffly at attention, strange weapons loose in their hol-

sters, with three or four scantily-kirted girls serving food and drink to the officials. Theatrical, lurid—but Ed knew this room might see the pronouncement of his and Torstein's death sentence.

Finally, after what seemed an interminable time, someone came forward, placed trumpet to lips, blew one long strident note. Then he cried: "The Regent has decided! The Regent's word is Wisdom!"

Forcing wind through a dry reed, you might be able to imitate the Regent's shrill voice. Bending that reed almost in two, you might be able to mime his posture. "Here on Level One it is indeed a rarity to receive two unescorted visitors from a lower level. But such has happened this day."

Muttering among the officials, and then the Regent went on: "I have received the intelligence reports from Colonel Utgard, I have weighed them against the contrary opinion of Colonel Welcome. I have this to say: there should be no question. Death to intruders stands out as a paramount necessity of the order of things."

Utgard's smile was a cold thing now. He was sure of himself, and did not hesitate to show it in his expression.

TORSTEIN whispered, "Listen, Ed, I don't know how far we can get, but if his decision is death, you want to make a run for it?"

Ed let his glance rove over the scores of uniformed guards. He shrugged. "I sure as hell wouldn't like to die lined up against a wall or something, with a blindfold on my eyes. But running away and getting shot in the back wouldn't do Freya much good, either. Let's wait and see."

"...however," the Regent's shrill voice continued, "there are extenuating circumstances here. Will the two Third Level men come forward?"

"That means us," Torstein mut-

tered, and with Ed siding him he stalked grimly down the length of the long hall. The last mile?

"Young," said the Regent, surveying them. "I did not realize you were so young. Do you know where you are?"

Ed said the one word, "No." Then he added, "But we're not on Earth, that's for sure."

"Don't jump to conclusions. You are on Earth. An Earth. There are, you see, many Earths."

Torstein scowled. "Better repeat that."

"Consider," explained the Regent. "At every moment in history, a decision has to be made. One decision means one sort of world, another means something else again. Did you know that a world exists on which the conqueror—what's his name, Hitler?—enslaved all Earth?"

"Wait, don't interrupt. What I mean is this: space curves back in on itself along with the whole universe, interlocking bubbles curved in four-dimensional space. In each bubble there is a different Earth, the point of departure being a complete break in historical continuity."

"Hold on." Torstein held up his hand. "Hold on. I read something like that once, long ago. Worlds of If, you mean. If such-and-such happened, we'd have a world like this, but if something else happened—"

"Now you're getting the idea, young man. Here on the first level, a scientist named Isaac Newton did not stop with his laws of gravity. You know of Newton?"

"Sure," Ed told him.

"Well, he went much further here, discovering several centuries ago what Einstein discovered only recently on your world. And that led us to the interlocking dimensions, as it will probably lead your version of Earth

in another two hundred years. It also gave us a multi-dimensional headache!

"OH, I WON'T deny it. We receive a lot of valuable commodities from the various cultures on the various Earths. But secretly, because our paramount rule is lack of detection. The whole economy would be unbalanced if the other levels knew, which is why Colonel Utgard wants you destroyed." The Regent's stern face creased into a smile. "I think he feels responsible. You see, years ago his division—under the original Utgard, his grandfather—botched things up terribly, taking people from one level, placing them on another, that sort of thing. You'd be amazed what sort of havoc that could wreak with the probable sequence of events. You'd be—"

"That's very interesting," Torstein grunted. "But what I want to know is this: do we get killed, or don't we? And if we don't, can we take Freya with us and go home?"

"Patience, young man, patience! You'll have me believing Utgard is right! Did you know that your sister Freya belongs on another level? Now, the law states that if a man lives on the wrong level—and, mind you, that has happened in several cases because of the botch-job done by Utgard's grandfather—he must be returned instantly. We've been cleaning up on that for years now, with still a lot of work to go, the theory being that the curves of Probability in each dimension can be altered by such dislocation.

"However, Colonel Welcome has proposed an interesting theory. He does not think we are ethically justified in our action. Someone lives all his life on one level and, right or wrong, that is his home. Nothing, he says, gives us the right to upset all the people involved—the families, the

friends, you know, that sort of thing. You, my young friends, will be a test case."

By now, Ed's brain was whirling. He couldn't deny, he could only believe, and belief left a jumble of impossible concepts. . . .

"What do you mean, we'll be a test case?"

"This: our decision is not immutable. The girl Freya Haugland has been returned to her true level, where a life has been prepared for her. We will give you one of our ships—and you may try to find her!

Ed leaped forward impulsively, shook the withered old hand. He'd expected death—and got this instead! "Thank you, sir. On which level can we find Freya?"

"On the Fourth."

"Thank you. That shouldn't be too hard. We'll have a whole Earth to search, but there should be some hints." A different Earth among many different Earths in a universe of probable worlds. But there it was. . . .

"It isn't as simple as that, young man. There exist on each level a dozen Earths! The level merely designates the cultural status of the world in question."

"Okay, which world?"

The old man shook his head. "Oh, no! You're on your own! You find out, then you try to get her. With these conditions, too, I might add: First, if you find her, if you can return her to your own Earth, I think we will agree to open up inter-dimensional travel for your people. Second, if you cannot find her, the whole adventure is forgotten, the events are erased from your minds hypnotically, and that's that. Third, if you find her and she refuses to go with you, she remains on the Fourth Level, you return here so that Colonel Utgard may dispose of you in any way he selects."

And, when Ed started to say something: "Enough, young man. You have received my decision. No more! I have spoken."

Something told Ed the third condition might turn out to be the sleeper. Why on Earth—why on *multiple* Earths—would Freya refuse to return once they found her? And where did the old hag fit in? No one here on Level One had even mentioned her. Yet, except for her mysterious understanding of the whole setup, they wouldn't be here at all.

As he strode back across the hall, these thoughts chased one another around inside his head. But they cleared out fast when he spotted Colonel Utgard standing off by himself in a quiet but all the more furious rage.

Said Torstein, as they left the hall with a smiling Colonel Welcome, "I don't think we've seen the last of that devil."

Ed agreed, and it didn't make him happy.

"GOODBYE, my young friends," said Colonel Welcome, leading them to their ship the following day. "Searching one planet would be a life's work, and you have twelve! Good luck—"

"We owe our chance to you," Ed told him. "If there's any way we can repay—"

"Ridiculous!" Welcome roared. "Payment enough, if you succeed, if I can see that Utgard knocked down a peg or two. But a warning, lads: watch him. He has freedom between the worlds, you know. He can travel back and forth at will. And he may give you trouble."

"Don't I know it!" Torstein nodded. "We'll look out—"

"And listen," Welcome confided. "I'm not permitted to tell you where

you can find Freya Haugland, but that is the only restriction. Would it perhaps help if I informed you where you might find an old hag who lived on your Earth once, but who was relocated to a Fourth Level world? Not necessarily the same world as Freya's, but Fourth Level nonetheless?"

"Would it!" Ed cried. "You're damned right."

"Well, you'll find an instrument panel in this ship. Four big levers, one for each level. Twelve notches on each one, each notch for a known world. There are others between the notches, an infinity of unknown Earths, unexplored. The work is slow. At any rate, you will find your hag's world if you use the fourth lever and its ninth notch. Again—good luck!"

"One thing more," said Torstein. "That is, if you can answer it. What causes a change of size?"

"That's simple. You'll observe that strong electromagnetic energy is needed to activate the ships. The aurora, an electrical storm, the inside of a powerful electrical device. That energy is merely for relocation in space. Infinitely more is needed for dimensional hopping, as we call it. The atoms of your body must be squeezed together, temporarily, yielding the energy of the interatomic forces which bind them together. Do I make myself clear?"

"No," Torstein laughed. "But forget it. We'll see you again, Colonel Welcome?"

"I hope so."

"Goodbye," Ed called, climbing within the ship.

"Goodbye, and don't forget Utgard...."

Ed pulled the circular door shut, bolted it, turned to face the same bare cubicle—except that this time a series of levers hung from the far wall.

"What are we waiting for?" Tor-

stein crossed to the wall, examined the instruments. "Twelve on each one—ah, here we are, last lever, ninth notch. You know, I'll feel strange seeing the hag again after all these years."

"The hag, sure. And after that, Freya. Pull that thing whenever you want, Tor."

Torstein did, and a giant hand slammed them both down into a black pit as the ship gathered its tremendous energies and roared away from the First Level.

THEY LEFT the ship behind them in a forest glen, bright sunlight shining down on it through the foliage in fantastic patterns. The ninth world out of twelve on the Fourth Level. But, Ed wondered, how do you go about finding one ancient woman on a totally new world?

"Don't worry," Torstein advised cheerfully. "The hag has a way of making her presence felt."

He failed to grasp the magnitude of the problem, and Ed told him that. "Look—this is an alternate Earth. Seven continents, millions of square miles of land. Back on our Earth, did anyone in New York ever hear of your Norwegian hag?"

"I did."

"Sure, but you're an exception. Anyone else, except for Freya? All I want to know is this: how do we even start looking for her?"

"Why, we simply ask the first person we meet. The hag has a name, and that should help. She's Elsa Thorssen." Torstein began to whistle an old Norse tune.

Dust appeared on the road far ahead of them, a small swirling cloud of it. Soon they descried an old horse-drawn cart, its driver perched high on a pile of colorful cloths. Torstein hailed him, but it wasn't necessary. With much swearing at his horse, he

pulled the cart to a stop when he reached them.

"Can I deliver you anywhere?" the middle-aged merchant demanded, smiling out at them from under a mop of unkempt hair and a great bristling moustache.

"That depends," said Torstein. "We're looking for a hag, upwards of a hundred years old, perhaps, who calls herself Elsa Thorssen."

The merchant laughed. "Well, I suppose you wayfarers must have your little joke. Magitrix blessings on you then, if I can't take you anywhere."

"Who's joking?" said Torstein. "I only asked—"

"Don't they all? A cousin of mine, on my mother's side, waited for an audience with the Magitrix for five years. Far as I know, he still waits. You have to know someone who knows someone who... well, you get the idea, I think."

Torstein placed his big hand against the side of the cart. "I take it you know Elsa Thorssen?"

"No. But I know of her. Everyone does. Say, are you serious? I'm heading for the city of the Magitrix myself."

"How far?" Ed wanted to know.

"Just four or five miles up the road. But everyone also knows that. Just who are you two, with those foolish questions, and that clothing?"

What was it the Regent had told them? Above all, this matter of parallel worlds must be kept a secret, else a serious disruption of economy on all worlds might result. "Like you said," Ed told the merchant, "we're a couple of wayfarers, new in this part of the country. Will you give us a lift to the city?"

"Give you a lift? What does that mean? Oh, will I take you? Certainly, certainly. Climb in."

The cart groaned and creaked its

protest as they did so, and the stout horse strained at his harness, but soon they went bumping and clattering down the uneven road. "Magitrix blessings on us all," intoned the merchant as they started on their way.

THEY STOOD in an anteroom, lavish, richly furnished. "So he brings us here, says this is the Palace of the Magitrix," Ed muttered. "What does that mean? Will we find your hag here? Will we come any closer to Freya?"

"If you have some patience—" Torstein began, but then they had reached a large circular desk, and the matronly woman behind it said, "Magitrix blessings, young men. May I help you?"

"Does anyone here know an Elsa Thorssen? Torstein scowled. "I was led to believe we might find her here."

The matronly woman's face split into a broad grin. "Some people will try anything to get in. Don't tell me you don't know whether she's here or not?"

"I merely asked a question."

"Very well." The smile vanished. "She is here and I know her. Now what?"

"We'd like to see her."

"So would a couple of hundred million other people. But few ever do. I could arrange an appointment with one of the acolytes—"

"Madam," Torstein broadened his a's and sounded almost fawning; Ed tried to hide his smile, had to cough to cover up his laughter. "Madam," said Torstein, "have you access to Elsa Thorssen?"

"I do."

"Will you be good enough to inform her that Torstein Haugland has arrived to see her? Please?"

The woman snapped her fingers and a youth hopped up to her desk, after

parting a curtain and stepping quickly out of an alcove.

"Torstein Haugland here," the woman told the boy, who skipped back inside his alcove again. They waited five minutes, and then ten.

Fifteen.

The boy came out again, flushed of face and panting. "Magitrix blessings, all."

"Magessings." The matronly woman rolled it all together.

"Torstein Haugland may enter, with this reservation: if he is not Torstein Haugland but merely claims to be, his head will find itself on a refuse dump."

"You mean if he's who he says he is she'll see him?"

"That's what they told me."

"Twenty years behind this desk," the matronly woman mused. "I've seen them come and I've seen them go—the rich, the poor, people who thought they had influence, people who just hoped—and she saw almost no one. Now these two... well, Magessings, I always say. You may follow the boy."

THEY DID, through the heavy draperies and into his alcove. Inside, he opened a door, bowed low and ushered them into a long, well-lit tunnel. Ed got the impression that the way wound underground and since the building had seemed quite unimposing on its ground level, he did not know what to expect.

The tunnel opened out on—splendor.

A great, high-vaulted chamber, its upper walls lost in haze, its ceiling only half-seen through flitting, coruscating swirls of light. Great marble columns soared up toward the haze, lost themselves in the curtain of light. Ed's feet sank almost to the ankles in rich carpeting which could have been one incredible expanse of

ermine, kept somehow virgin white.

"By the Elder Gods!" Torstein swore. "Someone sure knows how to live in style."

"The hag? You think it's your Elsa Thorsen?"

"Bah! How could that be? I remember she used to like the simple things, except when it came to magic and witchery. The hag wouldn't know what to do with all this luxury."

Ed chuckled. "You know, if this is where they took Freya, I almost wouldn't have the heart to ask her to leave."

"I doubt it. Remember, Colonel Welcome said that while he couldn't tell us that, he could tell us how to find the hag. No, I think my sister lives elsewhere."

The boy led them to a door at the far end of the huge wall, said, "Magitrix blessings. You go in there."

Ed tried the door, opened it, entered with Torstein. A simple room, sparsely furnished, and another door. No, Ed observed, two of them. Two doors, half a dozen paces apart, identical in every respect. Strange, the boy hadn't given any instructions. And had he been laughing at some secret joke when he scurried away?

A little doubtful, Ed hung back, but Torstein boldly tried the right-hand door.

A FURIOUS growling issued forth.

Came a clanking of chains, and something hideous peered out at them. "Close the damned thing!" Ed cried, rushing forward and putting his shoulder to the door. It refused to budge, even when Torstein added his great strength.

Warily, they backed away, observed that the chained monster couldn't fit through the aperture. Its neck, however, could, and it was endowed with plenty of neck, a dozen feet of great

serpentine muscles, ending in a flat head with red-rimmed little eyes. A tongue flicked in and out of the foot-long jaw as the neck wagged back and forth, sending the head out exploring in all directions.

Torstein picked up a chair and hurled it. It struck the beast squarely across its snout, and it growled indignantly, searching about with its tiny eyes.

Fascinated, Torstein stood and watched, but Ed grabbed his arm and pulled him away. "If you want to be that thing's dinner, stay right here!"

"What can we do? Don't tell me you're going to leave."

"There's another door, remember? Maybe we'll find your hag through there. Of all the crazy receptions!"

They skirted the dragon-like thing, and Ed got a brief glimpse of its monstrous bulk through the partially opened door. Only its girth and a taut chain which Ed could see at the base of its neck, prevented it from coming all the way out. Still, that neck could rove the entire antechamber....

"Okay," Torstein said grimly when they reached the other door. "My luck seems to have petered out on the last one. Suppose you try."

For a moment, Ed waited. Could that monster be a prelude to something more fearful? But why? They'd merely asked to see Elsa Thorssen, and although the matronly woman had displayed considerable surprise, Tor's name seemed capable of opening all locks. Further—but Ed stopped his pondering and flattened himself against the door when the monster head flicked close, weaved away for a moment, then started to come back.

He pushed the door in.

The woman who shrieked, "Come in, come in!" and then shut the door against the extended head of the monster could have been **Methuselah's**

grandmother. A black cowl framed her withered face with its shrunken cheeks and slit-like mouth. The deep-set eyes alone appeared young, staring out anxiously from their skin-folds.

SHE HOBbled about them for a time, chattering meaninglessly to herself. Then she said, almost merrily, "Torstein, which one is Torstein? Of course, I'd recognize you anywhere. My, you've grown."

She prodded Tor's ribs with a boney paw of a hand, then began to cackle. "Did you come here just to find me, Tor? And how is little Freya, eh?"

Torstein growled, "Do I say 'Magitrix blessings' first? Everyone in this crazy place seems to say it."

"That's up to me in this room," the hag confided. "Do you like the way I speak English, Tor? Everyone speaks it here, and so I had to learn it. Now, what did you say? Oh—no one has to say it in this room. You see, I am the Magitrix. I rule this world."

"I give up," Torstein said. "Better explain."

"There's nothing to explain, young Tor. I belong here, I never should have been on your Earth at all. I came of my own free will, and so they didn't have to strike any memories from my mind. Everyone laughed when I knew the old magic, eh? Everyone doubted, but I have flitted about among the parallel worlds, and I know how to summon the First Level ships. Now, what are you here for?"

"Wait! I hope the reception outside didn't frighten you. They run everything on this world by chance. If someone's granted an interview with me, he still must run the risk of becoming an appetizer for my little dinosaur outside. You see, they put everything to use, and dinosaurs still live here. It's a crazy, superstitious world,

Tor—but don't go telling that to my subjects."

Tor said, "This man here is Ed Langdon. He is to marry our Freya."

The hag circled Ed two or three times, looking at him from every direction. "He's not a Norther," she muttered. "Do you approve, Tor? I'm glad you brought him here for my approval."

"Yes, I approve. And I didn't bring him here for any such thing. Listen." Quickly, Torstein sketched in all that had happened.

When he finished, the hag shook her head sadly. "So they took her back. They took her once, you remember, long ago. What would you have me do? Because I rescued her once, it doesn't mean I can do it again. Travel between the parallel worlds is a strain, as you must know, and now I am well past fifty."

"I'll say," Tor grinned.

ED SPOKE for the first time. "We came for one reason only. If you rescued Freya once, then you know where they took her. We want you to tell us what you know."

"Well, she's here on the Fourth Level."

"You mean right here on your world?" Ed demanded.

"I did not say that. There are twelve worlds on the Fourth Level of culture. This is the ninth. Freya's—"

"Yes?" Torstein leaned forward eagerly.

"I don't know if I should tell you! If I do, you'll only go scampering off again, before I've even had time to appreciate your visit, young Tor. Maybe I ought to tease you for a while."

"If you do—remember when I used to go around chasing you with a broomstick when I was a child?"

"Heh, heh—and did you think I

cared? I enjoyed it! You can't use coercion, Torstein. Perhaps I may suggest a compromise."

"Go ahead," Ed suggested, but Torstein was fuming.

"Well, when you find her, why don't you all come here to live? After I die—I'm well past fifty, you know—Freya can become the Magitrix."

Torstein seemed too angry to speak, but Ed told the hag, "That's ridiculous. We came to bring Freya back to Earth, to our own Earth, and that's what we'll do, with or without your help."

"I like him!" the hag cackled. "He may not be a Norther, but he acts like one."

For a while it looked like Torstein had swallowed his tongue, but now he managed to say, "What's your answer?"

"I will suggest another compromise," the hag said brightly.

"Bah, you senile—"

There was no stopping the hag. She laughed and stamped her foot up and down. "That's wonderful. Did you know that your grandfather called me that, too?"

Torstein smiled in spite of himself. "How can that be? You're only past fifty." Then he sobered: "Listen, we don't ask much. I want my sister, Ed wants his sweetheart. You know where they've taken her. Talk."

"I said I will suggest another compromise. If you two will agree to stay for dinner, then perhaps I will tell you. Perhaps."

"Of all the bothersome old hags," Torstein began, making Elsa Thorssen grin from ear to ear, "you are the worst. Every moment might be important, and you—"

"It's only a few hours," Ed admitted. "We'll stay, provided you take the maybe out of your conditions. You'll tell us, definitely."

"We-ell—all right. Agreed."

"By the Elder Gods!" Torstein cried. "She likes you! I never knew her to make a definite statement to any man...."

The dinosaur head and neck had vanished from the anteroom when they crossed back through it with Elsa Thorssen, and the hag merely went to the second door and bolted it, chuckling something about a mighty hungry critter. They'd fit that description too, Ed realized. It'd been a long time since they'd sat down to a decent meal. And just how long had it been since the Hendrix television set acted as a conductor for the blue ship? Not long, not really, but it could have been years since last he'd seen Freya....

THEY ATE dinner in a huge hall, although the original high-vaulted underground chamber would have dwarfed it. With them at the table sat a dozen other black-cowled figures—acolytes, as the hag explained. And even in the brief time it takes to eat a meal, Ed could see just how much living on this particular alternate Earth depended on chance.

The main dish came in individual platters, each covered by a shining metal dome. When an acolyte lifted the dome, he found either a savory slab of roast ham or a mess of gruel! Maybe the gruel was nourishing, Ed didn't know. But it looked terrible. And the acolytes who received the substitute didn't bat an eyelash. That was the way you lived—according to chance.

Afterwards, performers trouped out into the hall, and once a young dancing girl tripped and fell. She regained her feet almost immediately, and slunk off into a corner while the nearest acolyte grunted something to a waiting guard. The man nodded, led the girl away.

"She'll be imprisoned for five years," explained the hag.

"What for?" Ed wanted to know.

"Well, it depends on the disposition of the nearest acolyte when such an accident occurs. Had he inclined himself toward mercy, she'd have continued dancing. But, you see, that particular acolyte received a plate of gruel instead of his roast ham, and he wasn't feeling too happy about it. So he took it out on the girl. Of course, it could have worked the other way, but then all things have a way of equalizing."

"Just what do you do here?" Torstein asked.

"Once in a while someone balks at the system. When that happens, he applies for an audience with me. But I can always refuse, which I often do if I feel that chance alone had brought on the man's troubles."

"She wanted us to bring Freya here," Torstein said. "She's crazy!"

"Perhaps, perhaps. Anyway, that is past, for I said I will tell you how to find the girl. Are you sure you won't stay another day?"

"We're sure," Ed informed her.

And Torstein said, "Talk!"

"First world of the Fourth Level, my young friends. I suppose this is goodbye...."

Tears welling up in her eyes, she led them back through a tunnel, through the first great hall, and finally up to ground level. She prodded a uniformed man with her knobby hand.

"You!"

"Ye-es, Magitrix!" Apparently Elsa Thorssen didn't make a habit of hobnobbing with common soldiery.

"You are to take my two friends where they direct you. After you leave them, you are to forget what you see."

"How can I do that?"

IT WAS important, Ed knew, because the hag alone on this world knew of the parallel Earths. And she must keep her secret.

"Oh, you will do it. And I grant you an audience in advance. Next time chance plays you a mean trick, I will see you and pass judgment. Now, go."

"Magitrix bless—"

"Poo! Don't give me my own blessings. Begone! Get your horse and carriage ready." Then, after he had departed: "Goodbye and good luck, my two young friends. And Edward?"

"Yes?"

"When you find Freya—if you find her—make her happy. Do that, or I promise I'll find a way to haunt you."

"Oh, he'll make her happy," Torstein grinned. "You should see how in love they are..."

The hag wiped a tear from her cheek with a corner of the black cowl. "Is there something you'd like to know before you leave?"

Ed nodded. "On the First Level, a Colonel Welcome told us that even if we found Freya, we might have trouble taking her back. Why?"

"Colonel Welcome! Ah, yes—a nice young man, if a bit on the portly side. I know him well. I remember—"

"Ed's question," Torstein suggested. "What about that?"

"Well, Colonel Welcome is right. First, they will erase the memories from Freya's mind and, while dim shadows might remain, she may not know you at all. But more important than that, the first world on the Fourth Level is an Earth ruled by women! It parted from your own world an age ago, when a decisive battle was fought between the ancient Greeks and the mythical Amazons. Except that in the world where they have taken Freya, the Amazons won. So they rule, and don't ask me what it is, but something on that world makes women a match

for men physically. Some men are stronger, some women are. It depends entirely upon the individual, but the women have ruled for thousands of years, and they intend to keep things that way."

Ed frowned. "Why should that make our job more difficult?"

"Well, add it to the fact that Freya won't remember you. She's liable to get angry, blacken your eye or have one of her friends do it, mop up the floor with you, and send you off packing! Well, goodbye—and don't say I failed to warn you..."

"Parallel worlds," Torstein mouthed his diapproval. "Women should stay at home, caring for the young ones."

Outside, their coach and driver waited for them. As they clattered away, Elsa Thorssen waved goodbye in the gathering darkness.

ED ORDERED their driver to stop a few hundred yards short of the grove of trees which hid their ship, and with Torstein he waited until the man had driven away. Night had come, but a full moon hung high in the heavens, lighting their way.

"Here we are," Torstein said after a time. "See how the moonlight gleams on that blue hull. See—"

"Shh!" Ed raised a finger to his lips for silence. Strange, the door stood ajar, but they'd left it closed. Something appeared briefly in the doorway. A dim shadow, hardly more than that. But the shadow of a man!

Ed ran forward, saw the shadow dart away, plunge into the woods. Ed followed, hunching his shoulders and forcing his way through the thickets and dense undergrowth.

Closer, closer... He dove, grabbed running legs, brought the cursing man down. They rolled over and over, struggling, striking out blindly in wooded darkness which the moon

failed to penetrate.

"Where are you?" Torstein called, crashing through the undergrowth. "I can't see you!"

The man got to his feet, but Ed clambered up after him, and they locked together once more. Strong, whoever he was, and grimly determined to get away.

For a moment, Ed lost his footing in the tangled matting of vines and creepers. But it was enough. The man probed out in the darkness, touched his face briefly. Ed still swung his hands out wildly to regain his balance, and an instant later a fist crashed against his jaw.

Ed toppled, fell, heard the man scurrying away. He started to get up, more than a little groggy, but Torstein chose that moment to discover the scene of the fight, and plunging in blindly, he stumbled against Ed and they both fell in a heap.

"Where is he!" Tor cried. "I don't hear him now!"

"No." Ed rubbed his jaw, which had begun to throb. "He got away, whoever he was."

"Well, we'd better see."

THEY FANNED out through the woods and searched, but in the darkness it proved a hopeless task. Wearily, Ed led the way back to their ship. They entered, found the wall panels glowing with dull light.

"At least we can see what damage has been done," Torstein said.

"Yeah? How? We don't know a thing about this ship, except what levers we have to press. We won't discover anything, Tor, not if we search from now till next week."

"Well, if the hag hadn't detained us—"

Ed shrugged. "What's done is done. And she sure as hell had nothing to do with it, Tor. Remember Colonel Wel-

come's warning. Utgard didn't like us one bit, and he liked even less what the Regent had decided. It would be easy for him to send a man here and foul up our ship."

"Yes? How could he know where we went? Certainly Welcome would not have told him."

"So what? Don't forget, we don't know a thing about this. Maybe they have a way of tracing ships between the parallel worlds, something like radar. I don't know."

"Then the important thing is this: shall we just forget the whole thing and set out for Freya's world? We could call the hag to look at the ship."

Ed shook his head. "No, we've spent enough time here already. Besides, that guy is liable to return."

"You want to go?"

"I want to go." Ed nodded eagerly. Maybe someone had tampered with the ship. Well, that was a chance they would just have to take.

Ed crossed to the controls, pulled the fourth lever all the way down to its first notch.

The now-familiar force of acceleration gripped them, crushed them to the floor. Even the black-out became familiar. . . .

"HERE WE are," Torstein said later, opening the door. "See, you were right, we didn't have anything to worry about."

Anxiously, Ed stuck his head outside. Bright sunshine greeted him, and he saw a fertile plain rolling to the horizon in all directions. A nice world—

Abruptly, he pulled his head back inside and slammed the door.

"What's the matter?" Tor demanded.

"Nothing much, damn it. Except that this isn't the right world."

"How can you tell so quick?"

"Well, I poked my head out and things looked real nice. But then something came bouncing up over a low hill, and I knew we got the wrong address."

"Something? What?"

"A grasshopper."

"A grasshopper?"

"That's what I said, a grasshopper. Only it was about as big as the two of us, standing end on end, and we aren't exactly shrimps, Tor."

Torstein scowled. "Wait a minute. Wait a minute, don't get excited. Couldn't that mean that we merely remained small? You must get smaller, you know, along with the ship, to release interatomic energies."

"Sure, but you also have to get larger again. That's the way it works. The last stage is automatic, Tor. Welcome told me that, so we'll have to let it go."

"Then what do you think happened?"

"I don't know, but I can guess. If something as peculiar—and probably dangerous—as grasshoppers twice the size of men..."

"I see! If something like that existed on Freya's Earth, the hag would have warned us."

"Sure. And you know what that means? Whoever tampered with the controls fixed it so the ship wouldn't go where we directed. This world outside, Tor, is a place where insects and not men became the dominant creatures. Let's take a look."

They opened the door for only a few moments, but it was enough. Another giant grasshopper came bounding into view, chasing a tiny furry creature for dinner. Great wings droned overhead, and a flight of bees as big as men, striped brilliant yellow and black, flashed down at them.

Torstein slammed the door and turned to the controls as the bees

drummed against their ship, shaking it. "What now? There are four levers, twelve notches on each. Forty-eight possible worlds. Do we have to stop at all?"

Ed shrugged hopelessly. "I guess so. I—it's worse than that, Tor! Remember, Welcome said that the notches stood for known worlds, but there might be an infinity of unknown ones. If the guy did a good job on this crate, we may have to look at a thousand worlds. Maybe more. And it won't be this easy each time to tell we're at the wrong place..."

Torstein paced back and forth. He smiled, but weakly. "Well, we're young. Want to start now?"

"I don't see there's anything else we can do. Lord, what a mess. And Freya—"

"Take a number," Torstein said. "Any number. Third lever, seventh notch—coming up!"

A CLOUDY day. The outskirts of a small city. An orchard, with lush apples ripening on the trees. They appeased their hunger, found a brook and did the same for their thirst, and then a man approached them.

"We're strangers here," Ed began.

"You're telling me, fellow! What the devil is that blue contraption?" The thick-set man pointed at their ship.

"Never mind," Ed told him. "I have a question to ask you, and please answer it, no matter how strange it sounds."

"What's this? You from a quiz contest or something? Okay, okay, I'll answer."

"Well," Ed felt foolish asking it, but they couldn't waste the time it would take to explore around. "Who's boss in your family, you or your wife?" If the latter alternative proved the correct one, the man would not be

ashamed to answer that way, since it followed in accordance with the cultural pattern.

"Ho-ho! That's rich," the thick-set man roared.

"What's so funny?"

"Who's boss, me or my wife! Son, I have sixteen of 'em, sixteen wives. Which one did you have in mind?"

"Forget it," Torstein said, turning back to the ship. "Wrong world." Scratching his head, the man watched them climb into the sleek blue thing. Thunder and lightning darted down from the sky quite suddenly as the ship grew smaller and then disappeared. Shaken and afraid, the thick-set man returned to his home and his sixteen wives.

UTTERLY FLAT, the gleaming whiteness stretched off in all directions, dotted here and there with circular pits. From one of these pits, a long, cigar-shaped projectile pointed straight up at the sky. Abruptly it flashed up and away, leaving a glowing mass of slag in the white pit. A car whisked up, and attendants sprayed the slag, which hissed violently.

Ed stood at the portal of their blue craft, mouth agape. "You see that, Tor? Know what it is?"

Torstein shook his head, shrugged his giant shoulders.

"A world where they've conquered space travel." Ed spoke in an awed, husky voice. "How I'd like to see—but it's the wrong place, Tor. Again, the hag would have mentioned it...."

They re-entered their ship, and the thunderstorm which followed made the spraying of the pit-slag unnecessary.

"HEIL HITLER!" The black-shirted figure raised his hand in a stiff salute.

Torstein grinned wearily. "Here's the world where old Adolph got his

way. It's hard to believe, isn't it?"

"What did you say?" The soldier saw their ship for the first time, mouthed an unknown command in German. Shrugging, Ed and Torstein turned away, but the man whipped a revolver from its holster, motioned them to stand still.

Torstein dove at him and the gun went off wildly, creasing a furrow along the side of the ship. The struggle was brief and, when Torstein got to his feet, the soldier lay there without moving. Torstein picked up the gun, strapped the holster and cartridge belt around his own waist. "These might come in handy," he muttered, and they were on their way again....

A HIGH, rocky crag overlooking the sea on one side and stretching out to a barren, desolate wasteland on the other. Not a single tree, nor an insect. Not even the faintest odor of growing things. Nothing....

"What the hell is this place?" Torstein demanded. "How did we wind up over a desert? We haven't moved in space, Ed. We should come out over the same spot in each of the parallel worlds."

Below them, the surf roared against the foot of the crag, pounding out its fury in white froth.

"Geography might be different," Ed said doubtfully, looking about the drab surface of the promontory. A natural fault in the rocks had formed where it jutted out over the sea and, although the going proved difficult, they climbed down it, half-sliding from rock to rock, and finally reached the narrow beach.

Ed strode out across the sand, waded into the water. He bent and cupped his hands, brought them to his face and sniffed. "It doesn't even smell like it should." He **tasted it.**

"Good Lord, Tor! Try it."

Torstein did, then scratched his head.

"It isn't the slightest bit salty," Ed told him.

"I don't get it."

"Wait! I think I do. This place is dead, completely dead. Probably we're the only living things on this Earth, Tor. Maybe here, in this parallel dimension, Earth didn't get born till a lot later. It's a new Earth, Tor. No life, no time yet for salt in its oceans."

"Maybe," Torstein grunted. "But one thing's for sure; we won't find our Amazons here."

"Nor Freya," Ed nodded, leading the way back up the rocky crag.

A FLAT plain, and off in the distance what looked like a race-track with its long low grandstand and rambling stables. A strange, saurian smell came to their nostrils. "I don't know why," said Torstein, "but I don't think I like this place." He patted his holster, loosened its cover as they stalked out over the plain. They reached a grove of trees, entered it. From its other side, but still hidden by the foliage, they could see the race-track.

It wasn't right. Ed didn't get it at first, because they still were far away, and the audience in the grandstand consisted of many thousands of tiny dots.

They crept closer, out of the woods altogether. But as the saurian smell grew stronger, Torstein's caution was somehow conveyed to Ed. They crouched as they moved forward, finally reaching the oval track itself at a point directly across from the grandstands. A race was in progress and, obscured by dust, the riders came thundering toward them.

Closer—closer—and Torstein let out a yelp!

The steeds were men and women. Five sweating, struggling men, as many women. All naked, all with bridles and saddles and bits in their mouths. Strange reptilian things clung to their backs, used tiny whips to goad them on.

Her long legs flashing, a female steed took the lead, but a male, goaded on by the alien jockey, closed in and boxed her against the rail. She missed stride, stumbled—and the male went on to win by a considerable margin. Just like at the pony-tracks....

"All right," said Torstein. "I'm dumb. But I don't get it."

"I think I do," Ed told him as, a little sick over what they'd just witnessed, they stumbled back through the woods and toward their waiting ship. "Human animals, and creatures who rule over them. But did you ever see creatures like that, Tor?"

Torstein shook his head in bewilderment.

"Alien, that's what. Completely alien. Creatures from another world, coming to Earth in this parallel dimension and conquering us completely..."

THEIR SHIP was surrounded by a tight little ring of the green saurians!

"Want to become a thoroughbred?" Torstein grinned.

"It isn't funny, Tor. Do you think they'll go away?"

"They don't give any signs of it. What do we do, hide in the woods?"

"I don't—uh-oh! They've spotted us."

The dozen saurians, each no more than four feet high, walking upright on incredibly bow-legged limbs, peering out of huge lidless eyes, approached them. Two or three of them held whips, long, lead-tipped things, much larger than those Ed had seen at the track. One flicked his whip, and it streaked

out with a vague hissing sound, curling around Torstein's shoulder and bringing blood to his shirt before it was withdrawn. Torstein roared his rage. But he also dropped the gun.

Ed darted forward, picked it up, said: "If you went to the races, even if you were an official, you wouldn't carry a weapon, would you? Maybe a whip for the horses if you worked in the stables, but that's all."

One of the creatures flung its forelimb back, prepared to use the lash again. Ed pumped a shot at him, felt the gun snap back against his palm. The slug blew a hole the size of a baseball in the creature's middle, and it slumped to the ground, a green liquid oozing out.

The other creatures grunted and hissed among themselves, but when Ed snapped off two more shots and when two more of them fell to the ground, they backed away.

Another shot—and they were running.

"They'll come back!" Ed panted. "With some kind of weapon, I think. Let's get the hell out of here."

Tor needed no prompting. They ran to the ship, reached it just as the last of the saurian masters of an alternate Earth disappeared within the woods.

It had been a long time since Ed felt anything better than the crushing force of acceleration....

NIGHT. DULL fires glowed far off on the horizon, and overhead they heard a roaring of planes. Something white mushroomed up many miles away, something brighter than the sun at high noon. Temporarily, it blinded them, and the roaring concussion which followed threw them flat on the ground.

Dazed, Ed crawled to Torstein, began to see vague shadows through his tearing eyes. A dull silhouette, the ship

loomed before them.

"Atomic war," Torstein said as they staggered back inside. "By the Elder Gods, how I hope it stays right here. I'd hate to see that on our own Earth."

"It's bad enough either way," Ed agreed. "Same Earth, really. Same kinds of people. Maybe if some of those Ruskies on our Earth could see this, they'd cool off a little...."

A HUGE metal thing lumbered forward as they came out of the ship. Its arms clanging against its sides, it stopped before them. "Greetings, masters. But I thought all the masters were dead."

"A robot!" Tor cried incredulously. "A robot that can talk and think!"

Ed addressed the metal monster. "What do you mean, all the masters are dead?"

"They killed each other off with a plague," the hollow voice boomed. "We robots weren't affected, of course. But we don't know what to do. Can I serve you in any way? Here, tell me where you're going and I'll carry you. I can bring a companion to carry your friend," the monster added hopefully.

"Keep away!" Ed told him. "We're not going anyplace. We're leaving right now."

The robot looked hurt, blinking metallic lids over its eyes. "Are you sure, master?"

"I am sure."

The robot clanked off slowly, its metal shoulders slumped.

"So here man's work lives after him," Torstein said, shaking his head sadly.

DAYS PASSED. Weeks. They lost all track of time. World governed by a great cybernetics machine. Decadent world where men and women mated quite dispassionately when their eugenics agency prescribed it. Earth of

hairy, squat sub-men. A world where the United States had never fought its revolution against England, where Britain still ruled supreme. A place in which Christ had not been born, where men still worshipped idols and pagan gods. A world—all the worlds of infinite possibility.

Sometimes they stayed long enough to eat. Sometimes they remained in their ship for hours on end, to rest. Three or four more times, the German gun stood between them and death, but they reached a point where they had to count out the cartridges and, finally, in a peaceful garden of a world, where men had not known war or a lethal weapon for five hundred years, they discarded the revolver and threw away the empty cartridge belt. Idly, Ed wondered what the denizens would think of the ugly, snub-nosed thing.

Their beards grew, and Torstein looked more like a Viking every day. He shook his head in mock horror at the black stubble on Ed's chin and told him that a Viking would rather shave his face bare than stare in the mirror at a black beard.

Torstein's beard grew curly, and he said, "You know, for years I wanted one of these things, but every time I started to let it grow, Freya would march in on one of her visits and produce a razor and a shaving mug. My sister is pretty set in her ways, Ed."

"Yes... Freya," Ed mused. "I wonder, will we ever see her again...?"

"Cut it out! Stop that. Of course we'll see her, Ed. We'll find her if it takes the rest of our lives!"

"I don't want any octogenarian wedding, thanks! We'll find her, and soon!"

"Attaboy!" Torstein roared his approval, sounding utterly unlike the Viking he looked.

A BARE grassland without trees. A hot sun overhead, and scores of men, bare to the waist, digging a long slit-trench and piling a high embankment up in front of it.

"They look like they're preparing for war," said Torstein.

"Uh-huh. And look at those weapons, will you?" Off to one side of the embankment lay piles of spears, of javelins, bows and arrows.

"Primitive," Ed grunted. "So at least we know we're back on the Fourth Level."

Beyond a low hill was their ship, and the profusion of great trees there made up for the lack of them on the grassy plain. The blue hull would be well-hidden, Ed was thinking. And then he forgot all about it.

Someone approached them.

A woman, quite beautiful, and dressed so they could see it. Tall and lithe and sun-bronzed, she strode forward, garbed only in a brief kirtle which fell from navel to mid-thigh. Her shoulders were strong, but gently curved and feminine. And still more gently curved and more feminine were her bare breasts....

"Just what do you two think you're doing, loafing like that?" she demanded, a quiet authority in her voice.

"We're new here," Ed began. "We'd like to—"

"Bah! No one is new here! Just who do you think you're kidding?"

The girl strode forward, her bare limbs flashing in the sunlight. Suddenly, she reached out, grabbing Ed's now-long shock of hair in her strong fingers. She did a quick half-pirouette, spinning a completely startled Ed around and sticking out her long, shapely leg. He stumbled over it and at the same time she let go of his hair. He fell in a heap at her feet.

Dazed, he looked up. She stood with hands on hips, glaring down at

him insolently.

A broad grin split Torstein's face. "Ed," he said, "I think we have arrived!"

"NOW WILL you two get back into line and dig those trenches?"

Ed got to his feet. "Look at our clothing," he protested. "I said we're new here. And we'd like some information."

"Don't tell me what you'd like. I ordered you to dig those trenches. I meant it."

Ed face her squarely. "I'm looking for a girl who—"

The woman moved with lightning speed. One moment she stood with hands on hips, apparently cocking an ear and listening to him. The next, her right fist flashed out, struck the point of Ed's jawbone. It hurt. It hurt a lot, but he wanted to stand there as if he could take it and more of the same, because he had the feeling that they had to assert themselves now if they were to get any place. But what was it the hag had said? On Freya's world neither men nor women are the superior sex physically. It depends entirely on the individual.

Ed rocked with the blow, staggering back three steps, and the girl, smiling now, moved in on him. He couldn't fight with her, not with a woman. Yet that was what she wanted as she approached him. She hit him harder this time, again with her balled right fist, bringing it up from someplace below her waist.

The green plain, the men in the trenches, the wildly staring Torstein, the woman—all spun crazily. When they returned to normal, Ed sat on the ground with blood trickling from his nose. Torstein stood rooted to the spot, but the girl did not. She launched herself down at Ed, hitting him squarely with the force of her

leap and stretching him out flat.

"Hey, cut it out!" he pleaded, still unwilling to fight. With the advantage that she now had, he began to doubt that he could do anything about it even if he had wanted to. Something in the air, the hag had said, and women are men's equals. . . .

The girl sat astride his midsection, pumping lusty blows at his face with both fists. He squirmed, tried to get away, purely defensively, but she leaned forward and pinned his shoulders quite effectively with her knees, still striking trip-hammer blows at his face.

It couldn't be happening, he thought dimly. Except that it was. Left and right, left and right. His senses swam, and he heard the beautiful Amazon shouting, as if from far away, "Enough?"

"By the Elder Gods, enough!" Torstein cried. "You'll kill him if he doesn't fight back."

"Doesn't?" the girl laughed. "You mean can't." Nimble, she jumped to her feet, and Ed lay there panting and thoroughly exhausted.

The girl grabbed Torstein's shirt-front and brought his face inches from her own. "Do you want more of the same? No? Then pick up your friend and march over to the trenches with him. Come on, now! I want to see both of you digging inside of three minutes."

She released him and, shrugging, Torstein helped Ed to his feet, supported him with a shoulder as they walked to the trenches. The girl stood off to one side, looking very trim and lovely, and as completely feminine as any woman Ed had ever seen.

"HOW DO you feel?" Torstein asked, shoveling some dirt up on the embankment.

Ed leaned on the handle of his shovel. "Lousy, thanks."

Torstein laughed in spite of the situation. "She really gave you a licking, that slim girl."

"Slim, maybe. But her muscles were like iron, Tor! And—"

"You didn't want to fight back, did you? I mean, if you did, if you'd forgotten chivalry—"

"I don't know. I won't make any excuses. But she was strong, Tor. Maybe it would have been a good match, I don't know. But what the hell are we going to do now?"

"Don't look at me, Ed. But one thing I want us to decide. If it comes to fighting these Amazons again, we won't hold back. We can't. We want to find Freya, remember? And if on this world there is no sex distinction when it comes to physical activity, we're liable to get into a lot of trouble if we don't act accordingly. When you're in Rome, Ed—"

"Sure, sure." But Ed didn't feel that way at all. It was one thing to say it, and quite another to throw away a lifetime of tradition. Yet, that was exactly what they had to do, because the next time it could turn out to be a knife instead of bare fists, and if they didn't fight, they must at least protect themselves.

A whistle blew. Lunchtime. Kirtled girls, most of them pretty, came through the trenches, bringing buckets of some gruel which was ladled out into tin cups. Ed ate his gratefully, watched big Torstein take a second helping.

A man shuffled over to them, thirtyish, stoop-shouldered. "Mind if I join you, friends?"

"Not at all," said Torstein, introducing himself and Ed.

"Me," the little man said, "I'm Johnny Greengate. They captured me in their last attack on Pine Bluffs City. What about you two?"

"We're new here," Ed told him. "We come from a long way off."

"Oh," Johnny Greengate grunted. "I see. Maybe that explains why you didn't give up right away when Simmons—"

"Who?" Torstein demanded.

"The guard, Mary Lou Simmons. I was saying, maybe that explains why you tried to fight—"

"I didn't try to fight. It was all her idea."

"You coulda said you surrendered. Anyway, you're new here, like you say. But lemme tell you this, brother—better keep outer her path. They say Mary Lou Simmons is a nice gal when she likes you, but otherwise—thunder and lightning, brother!"

"Go ahead. I'm listening."

"Not much more to say. Last week they held the Games. Once every full moon, you know. When it came to gymnastics, Mary Lou didn't do so hot. But fightin'—wow! I remember in the semi-finals she faced a big guy—big as your friend Haugland here—but she cut him down to size, all right, and they hadda stop th' carnage after a time. He was the hopes of the men, too. If he won, we coulda taken the trophy, first time in six months. Anyway, Mary Lou lost in the finals, but it was a close fight, and the gal who beat her was one o' them tall, graceful Nordic types. You know, beautiful as can be, but strong. Anyway, brother," he finished, as the whistle blew and the lunch buckets were removed, "better watch your step. I wouldn't want that Simmons gunning for me, nossir!" Then he quickly retrieved his shovel and began to dig furiously. "Speak of the devil—"

THE BRONZED girl, Mary Lou Simmons, stood at the lip of the trench. "You!"

"Me?" Greengate demanded, paling.

"No, that one. The guy I had to hit. You."

"Yes?" Ed raised his head. He hoped she wouldn't want to start all over again, because he knew he'd not be able to follow Torstein's sound advice.

"I—I'm sorry about before. Maybe I should have noticed your clothing, I don't know. Shake?"

She leaned down, extended her hand. Ed took it and she shook hands with him gravely, man-to-man fashion. "Are you really new here?" she wanted to know. "I can believe it, looking at your clothing."

"That's what I tried to tell you. We just came, and before I knew it—"

"I said I was sorry. I meant it. You two Gold or Black?"

"Huh?"

"Are you Gold or Black? A simple question. Don't you know anything?"

"Like I told you, we're a long way from home."

The girl frowned, jumped down lithely and joined them in the trench. "Where on Earth are you from?"

Ed felt like saying: *Yes, we're from Earth, all right, but a different Earth.* But he couldn't, for they had to keep that secret or forfeit their right to search for Freya. Besides, this business of parallel worlds still left him a little confused. Mary Lou Simmons, that was the girl's name. A nice name, a perfectly ordinary name, but only because the English-speaking peoples had spread all over the globe on this world too. A Mary Lou Simmons, slim and pretty, who could hold her own in a fight with any man, because here something added strength to the smaller-boned, smaller-muscled bodies of women.

"...where we come from," Torstein was saying, "there is no distinction of Gold and Black. I don't know what you mean."

"Well, that's hard to believe. Everyone knows that the city-states have divided into two armed camps, those

of the gold banner, those of the black. We're gold here in Crescent Village. But what we do with you depends on your own banner."

"I said we have none," Torstein insisted.

"Umm-mm. That makes it difficult. You see, these men in the trenches are Black-banner prisoners. We wouldn't have them digging our fortifications otherwise."

Torstein said, cheerfully, "Well, I guess that leaves us out. I guess we can go from these trenches and—"

"Don't get smart, wise guy! I didn't say that. I'm captain of the guard in Crescent City, so it's up to me. Maybe we can work out a compromise."

Ed nodded his battered face. "What do you mean?"

"Well, once a month we hold the Games. Black-banners aren't eligible, naturally, but all Golds and neutrals can compete. The higher you rise in the Games, particularly in the fighting, the further you can go in our military system. Would you like to try that?"

GINGERLY, Ed felt the bruises on his cheek, his puffed lips, his swollen eye. Well, he'd refused to fight back. Besides, some of his opponents, at least, would be men, and he'd feel no qualms about matching blows with them. "Yes," he said. "I think so."

"Good. Then it's decided. Full moon comes in three weeks. So, until then, you two will dig fortifications, but I'll enter your names on the fighting lists right now."

Ed gave her their names, which she wrote on a slip of paper, then she jumped out of the trench and walked back across the plain toward Crescent City, which looked like a cluster of white dots on the horizon.

"Games!" snorted Torstein. "Bah!"

Ed grinned. "Better change your

attitude, Tor. She didn't say it, but I think she meant that if we don't do well, it's back to digging trenches for us. And we're not going to find Freya, digging trenches. No, our only hope is to do well in the Games."

Now Torstein was grinning. "Yes? Well, what will you do if they put you up there against Mary Lou first thing?"

Ed grunted, picked up his shovel, started digging.

After three weeks, it seemed that all he'd ever done all the years of his life was this digging. But it was heavy exercise out in the strong sunlight, and what little softness city life had brought to his frame melted away. By the end of the third week, he could feel the smooth muscles rippling under his sun-bronzed skin with every stroke of the shovel. Physically he hadn't felt so good in years. But his thoughts were on Freya, somewhere in this world—possibly nearby for all he knew.

The day before the Games, Torstein had an accident. He stood on the lip of the trench, turned to tell Ed something. He lost his balance, swung his hands out wildly for a moment, then plummeted head-first into the trench.

He hit with a thud, and half a dozen of the prisoners came running, led by Johnny Greengate.

"He don't look so good," the man said.

"Damn it!" Torstein gritted. "I don't feel so good, either."

Greengate nodded. "I sure can see why, brother. They made me a medico over in Pine Bluffs, 'fore I got captured. Know what's wrong?"

"What?" Ed demanded, bringing some water for Torstein to drink.

"Broke his collar bone, that's what. Yessiree, neatest break I ever saw. I tell yuh—"

Ed looked. Tor's shoulder seemed somehow twisted, and when the big

man tried to move it, he couldn't.

"What happened?"

Ed turned, saw Mary Lou and an older woman he didn't know.

"He fell."

"Umm-mm." The older woman knelt by Torstein's side, probed around a while, then let her fingers stay on his shoulder. "It's broken, Captain Simmons."

"Hell, that's a shame. He was going to enter the Games."

The older woman, who evidently was a doctor, shook her head. "Maybe next year, you mean. I'm going to make a splint, but this man will need a lot of rest."

"Damn it!" Torstein swore. "That puts me out, Ed. You've got to enter those fights yourself, and you've got to do a good job. Feel up to it?"

Ed shrugged, watched while the doctor began to tape Torstein's shoulder. "I can try," he said.

"I," Torstein kept repeating over and over again, "am a clumsy oaf..."

THE DAY of the Games. Excitement had come to Crescent City, but Ed had seen only glimpses of it. He'd been ushered down to a little dressing room below the arena. A couple of cots, a first-aid cabinet, a shower. And Torstein pacing back and forth angrily, still fuming over the plaster cast on his shoulder.

"They said you go on right away tonight, in the preliminaries. Nervous?"

"You bet I'm nervous. I've got to win!"

Mary Lou peered in through the half-open doorway. "You decent? Ah, okay."

Ed wore a pair of white shorts they'd given him. No gloves. Apparently you could box or wrestle.

"I thought I'd give you a pointer or two," Mary Lou told him. He supposed she felt responsible for them

in a way, and he certainly needed all the help he could get. He nodded eagerly.

"First," said Mary Lou, "they don't let you see your opponent until the fight. You'll find a circular ring, so does your opponent. You grope around, find his shoulders, place your hands on them. He or she will do the same, and then the lights go on. That's the signal to start, and you fight. No holds barred. The fight ends when one of you is unconscious, or surrenders. Is that clear?"

Ed nodded. "Sure. But let's get one thing straight. Just how successful must I be to get us out of those trenches?"

Mary Lou smiled. "Whoever becomes champion can name his own ticket. That's the way it works.

"Meanwhile, all the contestants will probably fight twice each night, because rumor has it that the Black-banners are on the march, and we'd like to get the Games concluded before they come. Well, good luck."

"Will you be fighting?"

"Me? Naturally. I lost in the finals last month, but we'll see about it this time. Again, good luck." And Mary Lou was gone.

"Better hope you don't draw that tigress in the prelims," Torstein muttered.

"Or any other girl, Tor. I still can't get used to it. Probably I'd take what she had to offer without fighting back."

"By the Elder Gods, don't be a fool! In a sense you're fighting for Freya. We've come a long way for her, Ed. So if they put one of those Amazons in there with you, you'd better ram her pretty teeth down her throat before she does the same to you."

"I don't know," Ed admitted, slamming fist into palm. "It's easy to say, but..."

SOON AFTER that, a girl in pigtailed him up a flight of stairs and out into the arena, Torstein following behind. Ed could not see much in the darkness, but as he walked down the aisle he was aware of a babble of conversation all around him. Finally, his palms sweating and his mouth very dry, he climbed up into the circular ring. Just a raised platform with no ropes. Apparently, if you were hit hard enough and fell off, you had to climb back—if you could.

Remembering Mary Lou's instructions, he walked out into the center of the ring, stiffly, his heart beating a mad dance inside his chest. He groped out with his hands, found wide, hairy shoulders on a level somewhat under his own. A pair of hands fell heavily on his own shoulders, and something made him look up in the darkness.

Overhead, brilliant lights flashed on, half-blinding him.

Splat! Something crashed against his jaw and he felt himself falling. He blinked his eyes, began to see again, heard the roar of the crowd. A squat, muscular man with a bull-neck and beady little eyes stared down at him, then lumbered forward.

Ed rolled away, got to his feet. The man came on, his arms outstretched, ready for an embrace which might end with half a dozen of Ed's ribs broken. He darted away, then in, ripping three quick jabs to the man's face, and three more without a return.

He felt good. He felt quick, and he almost wanted to thank Mary Lou for his three weeks in the trenches. Again he flicked out with the left, and again, watching a red welt grow on his opponent's cheek.

It turned out to be no contest. Ed danced in and out, keeping away from the great hairy arms, striking at will with a short left jab, hooking from the outside when the man covered up. The bruising contact hurt his knuckles, but

his opponent's face took on the semblance of raw tenderloin.

The man cowered away, bringing both hands up to protect his head, and Ed lowered his attack, shifting it to the body, throwing hard lefts and rights which caught the unguarded midsection. Down went the guard, covering chest and stomach now.

A good left hook set the man up, and when Ed followed with a right cross, it was over. Slowly, his opponent fell. First to his knees, then all the way down, flat on his face.

WHILE THE crowd thundered its approval, two attendants came with a bucket of water, splashed the man's face, helped him to his feet. They took him from the ring, still dazed, and Ed prepared to leave.

Torstein met him, pumped his hand vigorously. "Three minutes, Ed! That's all it took. Well, let's get you rested."

A woman attendant jabbed Ed's chest with a thin forefinger. "Where do you think you're going?"

"Why, to get some rest."

"Uh-uh." The woman shook her head. "Two bouts an evening, young man. Stay right where you are."

"You mean now, right after that—"

"That's what I mean. Now."

The lights went out, and Ed heard someone else shuffling into the ring. Wearily, he made contact, waited. When the lights went on again, it turned out to be another man who could have been a carbon copy of the first.

He lasted half a minute longer, but the results were the same. His face glowing, Torstein ushered Ed away from the ring. "How you set him up with that left hook, man—it was perfect! You'll mow your way right through these Games."

Ed grinned boyishly, blew on his knuckles. "I hope so, Tor."

He fared as well in the quarter finals the following evening. His two opponents were tall and lanky, men who'd probably used his own tactics of hit-and-run to win the preceding evening. But now Ed changed his style, slugging away in each bout until he slugged at nothing but air. Again, two quick knockouts. Total time—less than ten minutes.

Torstein's enthusiastic optimism must have been catching, because Ed began to feel it the following evening as he prepared for the semi-finals.

But it didn't last. He got out into the center of the ring, found a pair of shoulders in the darkness. Smooth, well rounded.

The lights glared forth. -

Her body gleaming under the lights, Mary Lou smiled at him, then backed away and raised her fists.

"You've done better than I expected, Ed. Honest, you surprise me."

"Thanks," he said lamely, circling away as she shifted toward him.

"Well, come on. Won't you fight? The crowd won't like it if you don't...."

ED STOOD there, backed away again, heard the catcalls from the audience and Torstein's groan. Hell, Ed knew he'd never felt so strong in his life. Probably he could take Mary Lou—if he could bring himself to fight her.

But now he said: "I can't fight with you."

"Why not? Because I beat you once? I promise to make it fast." She had a cocky grin on her face.

"No. Because you're a woman. I can't fight a woman."

"But why? Of all the silly things—can't fight a woman! Why on Earth—"

Ed knew he couldn't explain. Different cultural patterns, and there it was. Meanwhile, a loud stamping of

feet came to his ears as the audience grew restless. And if he didn't win, he might find himself back digging trenches, with no way to look for Freya.

"Well," Mary Lou frowned, "that's enough talk. I said 'good luck,' Ed. I wasn't joking. But you can't win by standing still."

Ed stood off near the edge of the ring, and she came in slowly, cornering him. He had no place else to go, unless it was back and off the ring. But that would only delay...

Still two strides away, Mary Lou lowered her fists and hurled herself through the air, arms outstretched, ready to drag Ed down when she hit him.

He did the only thing he could do. He ducked, fell flat on the edge of the ring. Completely surprised, Mary Lou sailed over his head, hurled head-first off the raised platform, and struck—still head-first—against the cast on Torstein's broken shoulder.

Tor yelled his pain, and Ed knew they'd have to set his shoulder all over again. But it didn't matter. Mary Lou lay there at Torstein's feet. She breathed regularly enough, but she didn't try to rise. She'd knocked herself out with the force of the blow and, according to the rules, that made Ed the victor. A moment later, three officials signified that by placing a wreath over Ed's shoulders while the crowd hissed and booed.

"Okay," said Torstein, grinning in spite of his pain. "One way is as good as another, and you'll enter the finals in a few minutes. Don't complain."

"Who's complaining?"

HALF AN hour later, Mary Lou came into their dressing room, a bandage wrapped around her forehead. "Hello," she said. "It sure was a rotten piece of luck, Ed. But maybe I'll do it next month. Meanwhile, I

sort of feel responsible for you, so—"

"You mean you're not mad?"

"Gosh, no. That's part of it—luck. It could have happened to you just as readily, but it happened to me. Now I'd like to see you win. Except that I doubt it."

"Yeah? Why?" Torstein demanded. "I'd say Ed is doing all right for himself."

"I suppose he is. But do you know who the other finalist is?"

"How should I know?"

"The one who beat me out last month! Good, too. Strong and fast and tricky."

"A man?" Ed wanted to know.

Mary Lou shook her head. "A girl. So—"

"That does it. What the hell, I'll just walk up there, but I won't be able to fight."

"I don't understand you at all!"

Torstein said. "What, precisely, does Ed get if he wins?"

"Why... anything. Anything at all."

"For example, if he wanted to look for someone, could he have help?"

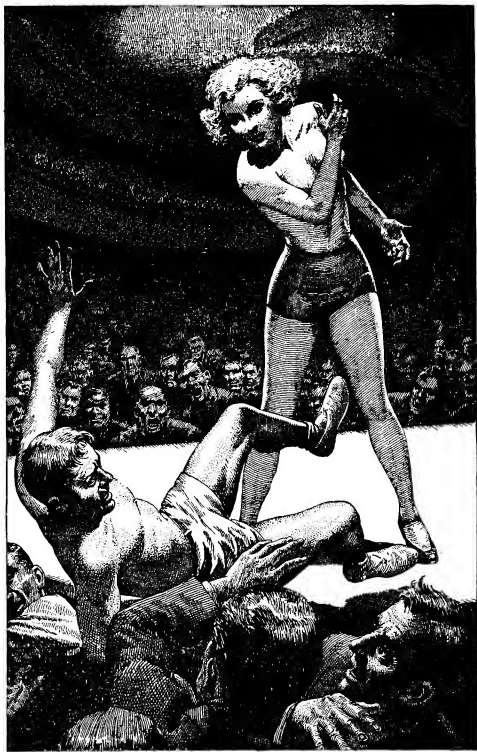
"Lord, yes! We'd give the champion anything. The key to every city under the Gold banner. Like I said, anything."

Torstein thumped his hand against Ed's shoulder. "You hear that? Damn it, if you win, we'll have enough help to find her, Ed. Don't tell me you won't try!"

When do you forget all about ethics, Ed wondered? Wasn't it a question of determining what factor weighed more heavily? Didn't he want to find Freya, wouldn't he risk his life over and over again for her? Wouldn't he?

And now all he had to do was throw a meaningless cultural pattern to the winds. "I'd be a jackass if I didn't," he said.

Chuckling, Torstein led him upstairs while Mary Lou whispered instructions in his ear



Try as he might, Ed couldn't hit her—it was against the entire culture of his people.

Again, the dark ring, the groping for his opponent's shoulders, placing his hands on them while the hushed crowd waited.

After his first fight, Ed had learned to look down when the lights flashed on. The first thing he saw was a pair of sandaled feet, shapely legs, white shorts above them. His gaze roved further. A bronzed torso, long and lean, but perfectly proportioned. A tall girl and a beautiful one, with proud breasts and shoulders and a billowing mass of blonde hair.

He looked at her face.

"Freya!" he cried.

"**T**HAT'S my name," she said haughtily. "But I don't think I know you."

Of course. Something about stripping her memory from her and planting a new one, making her think she had always been on this Earth. Freya....

She looked a little puzzled. "I don't think I know you, but you do look... familiar."

"Familiar? I'm Ed! Ed—"

"All right, Ed. Hello. But let's save the formal introductions for after the fight. Okay?"

She walked in toward him, but she failed to raise her hands. "What's happening to me?" she said to no one in particular. "I don't understand it. I—"

"What's the matter?"

"I can't fight! Something tells me not to fight with you: Yet—why? What's to prevent it? You're Ed, you said that. And yet, it seems to me—oh, I don't know. It seems to me I must have known an Ed once. Ed...." She rolled the name around on her tongue, flavored it, then shrugged hopelessly. "I don't know. I don't know."

He tried to drive the point home through the apparent chink in her

mental armor. "Remember the Hendrix apartment? The television set, and a little blue ship which got bigger? Remember, Freya?"

"I..." She paused, ran a hand over her eyes, shook her head furiously. "You're using witchcraft, that's what! I don't know you. I don't remember any of those things." Slowly, still unsure of herself, she lifted her hands to fight.

Ed heard the angry roar of the crowd, worse than last night. Angry, and he couldn't blame them. Here in the championship, the contestants refused altogether to join battle. The volume of sound increased, and he could not hear Freya, who was talking again.

Angry—no! Frightened perhaps. Men and women milled about in the aisles, clambored over the chairs, yelling and fighting one another in their haste to get away.

Torstein bellowed something, but Ed couldn't quite catch the words. Even Torstein seemed alarmed, and Mary Lou was pounding his back and shouting advice in his ears.

Ed backed to the edge of the ring, leaned down. "What the hell's the matter?"

Mary Lou's voice was a piercing shriek. "The Black-banners, that's what! They've overrun the city while we were all busy with our final night of Games. They've got the arena surrounded now, and with almost our entire military force inside—"

"Can't you fight your way out?"

"How? Our weapons are in the armory."

FREYA joined Ed, reached impulsively for his hand. She whispered fiercely, "I'm glad our fight will be postponed, Ed. I don't know why, but I'm glad. But now—what can we do now?"

Ed looked about wildly. A con-

fused throng, the Gold-banner warriors, women and men, seethed and tumbled through the arena, running and pushing aimlessly. And far off to the right, a compact wedge of armed women streamed in, brandishing spears and swords. One defiantly carried a banner overhead, a banner black as night!

Still numbed by the sudden attack, those within the arena hardly offered any organized resistance. Closer to the ring came the stream of warrior women, not fanning out, but seemingly intent upon Freya and Ed.

It didn't make sense, not at first. You'd think they would exploit their advantage to the hilt, spreading out and killing the Gold-banners in droves. Instead, they maintained their battle-wedge, hacking their way through the crowd, battering down only those who stood in their path, pushing their wedge ever closer to the ring.

And then, abruptly, the cloud of mystery lifted. There, in the rear of the wedge—a man, tall, dark, garbed all in orange.

Utgard!

Colonel Utgard who'd stop them from returning Freya to her own world at all costs.

Ed spun around and faced the girl. "Run! In the confusion, you could get away!"

"Why should I do that? What's so special about me?"

"No time to explain. Just believe me—and run!"

"That's silly. I'll stay right here and I'll fight if I have to. I'm no different from anyone else."

Ed flung his hands up in a shrug that was more eloquent than any words. By now, the vanguard of the wedge had reached the first row of seats and Torstein had spotted Colonel Utgard. "Ed, do you see who I see?"

And Utgard's voice, booming above the roar of the crowd. "That man will be dangerous. Get him. But I want him alive, and the girl, too."

Alive? Why? Ed didn't feel like looking a gift horse in the mouth, but Utgard's behavior failed to jell, especially when he shouted his next orders. "The man in the ring—you may kill him! But the other two I want alive!"

Torstein stood up as they surrounded him. He shouted, "By the Elder Gods, I can't even fight, not with this arm!" He swung ineffectually with his good left arm, and the lithe girls evaded his clumsy blows. One of them wrapped herself firmly about his legs as he climbed up and stood on his chair. He reached down to strike her away, lost his balance, tumbled over her shoulder and down to the floor. After that, they swarmed all over him, striking with the hafts of their spears. When they were finished, Torstein lay there unmoving, and two of the warrior women picked him up and began carting him off.

Mary Lou was on them like a fury. From somewhere she'd taken a sword, and she swung it in a great arc, plowing into them like a harvester into grain. For a brief moment, the wild attack almost turned them away, but the two women had dropped Torstein, and Mary Lou tripped over his unconscious body. She struggled to rise, got up to her knees and no further. Someone struck her from behind with a sword-hilt and she slumped across Tor's chest.

"THE RING is surrounded," Freya admitted, confusion in her voice. "But I don't know why they want us particularly."

"You heard what the man said. They want you alive. They want me dead!"

"And we have no weapons! Ed, I

wish I could remember the thoughts which clamor just out of reach. Some day, perhaps, I will remember them. But I don't want them too late. If they want me alive, and if I make things a little rough for them, maybe you can get away. Maybe—"

"Hey, wait a minute! I'm supposed to be rescuing you."

But Freya didn't hear him. She also didn't wait for the warrior women to reach her. The first of them had climbed halfway up to the ring, and Freya reached out and helped her. The surprised girl came forward, was spun about by Freya and deposited in a heap on the surface of the ring. Freya dove down after her, came up with a sword in left hand and spear in right. She flashed by Ed so rapidly that he had no time to question her intent, but he saw it for himself a moment later.

Freya met the other warriors before they could climb up, swung a continuous loop of flying metal overhead and kept them at bay with it. She turned briefly, cried over her shoulder. "Run. Run!"

"Ridiculous! I intend to help you!"

"That's what ridiculous. Live today so you can fight tomorrow. I'm safe; they don't want to kill me."

"Still—"

But that ended the conversation, for Freya had turned back to her foes. Aware of noise from the other side of the ring, Ed whirled around. Two of the women had fought their way around through the first row of chairs, now stalked Ed with raised, bloody swords.

One panted, "That's the one! He's the one we kill."

"Umm-mm, yes. You don't know why, do you, June?"

"Who cares? That Colonel what's-his-name is paying us enough money to choke an ox."

"Yeah, and we've been mercenaries all our life. Okay, let's get him!"

They came forward, two beautiful, if sweat-streaked and disheveled, women garbed only in black kirtles, their swords flashing overhead—each a messenger of death for Ed!

BUT THE times when he wouldn't fight back against Mary Lou were over. Now it meant life or death—and upon life depended his chance to fight again for Freya. He gave a wild war-whoop which, he thought, would have made Torstein proud, and charged the women.

So startled were they, attacked by an unarmed man, that they didn't have time to bring their swords down. He bowled them over, saw them fall one in each direction. But the force of his lunge carried him on beyond the edge of the ring and he plunged down into the seats.

When he got up, two of Utgard's orange-uniformed bodyguards met him, swords drawn. Apparently they couldn't bring their more lethal weapons here to the Fourth Level, for that would smack of another world, and it might lose Utgard his job. Believing, the men closed in.

Ed ducked under a wild blow, felt sword-point swish through his hair. He piled his right fist into the man's stomach, saw his face go suddenly gray, heard the sword clatter to the floor. He scrambled down after it, swung around and up in time to parry a blow from the other man's weapon which, had it landed, could have split him from crown to navel.

Together clanged the two swords, but the orange-uniformed man took the force of the blow down near the hilt of his weapon, and the sword clattered from nerveless fingers. Ed smiled grimly, said: "You don't know how to use that thing any more than

I do, huh?"

He turned away from the man, faced again the fighting in the ring.

Except that there was none!

Freya had been conquered, he could draw no other conclusion. Ed found himself wishing now that Utgard's command had been followed. Freya a captive would fare far better than Freya a corpse, but in the heat of battle anything could have happened.

All about him in the arena, the fighting had almost come to a standstill, as if the Black-banners had had but one purpose, and that to take Freya. From outside, he could hear shouts and an occasional scream, but within the arena, except for a few individual combatants paired off one against the other, Gold-banners milled about in confusion, licking their wounds.

Mary Lou stood up groggily. "What happened? Where's Tor?"

"They took him, alive I think. And Freya too."

"Freya? Oh, the girl you were to fight. But you sound more worried about her than you do about Torstein."

Ed smiled weakly. "There's something you don't understand. Tor and Freya are brother and sister. I came here with Tor to find his sister, whom I am to marry."

MARY LOU allowed herself no more than a brief instant of startled surprise. Then: "Well, I know where the Black encampment is. Want to go there—with warriors?"

Ed shook his head. "Wouldn't do any good. They're heading elsewhere, and I'll have to travel that road alone. If I can."

"Alone! That's what you think! Something's been happening right under your nose while you were busy with the Games. Something—Tor and

me, we—" She blushed, looked exactly like a shy maid of Ed's Earth. "We—well, Tor says he loves me, and I... Anyway, if you know where to find them, I'm with you."

He certainly could use her, but it would be a clear-cut violation of the First Level Regent's edict, and Freya might be forfeit as a consequence. On the other hand, Colonel Utgard had violated that edict himself, and Ed had a hunch the coldly logical Regent would let one factor balance out the other. "Okay, Mary Lou," he said. "But I'm warning you in advance, you're going to see a lot of strange things where we go, and most of what happens won't make much sense to you."

"Who cares? If we can find Tor! If we can..."

It hit Ed suddenly, like a thunderbolt. Utgard would take his captives back to the First Level. Fine, so they could follow in their own blue ship. Could they? No! They might not be so lucky this time with a ship that didn't work, and except for that stroke of fate, Torstein and Ed might still be visiting one parallel world after another, hopelessly. If it happened this time to Mary Lou and Ed, Utgard would find himself with years—and certainly months—to dispose of the two Hauglands as he saw fit.

"What are you stewing about now, Ed? I thought you said we could find—"

"I said a lot of things, but I left out the complications."

"You mean it might be a difficult journey to where we're going?"

"That's putting it mildly. That's—hold on!" Of course! He'd failed to see this thing out to its logical conclusion. Colonel Welcome had spoken of trade between the parallel worlds, trade carried on for the benefit of the First Level. Naturally, the people of

other levels did not know at all that interlocking dimensions were involved. Still, there should be something, and this Gold-banner city was one of the capitals of Mary Lou's Earth.

"Everything depends on what I'm about to ask you, Mary Lou. So think. Think like you never did before."

"I'm listening."

"There should be some strange people here in this city, people who don't belong. Traders maybe, or businessmen. They act peculiar. Maybe they don't know your customs, maybe they live entirely different than you do. Do you know of any such people?"

"What a strange question! Well, let's see. . . . No, no, I can't say that I do."

"Think!"

"I said I don't know. And listen, while you ask these foolish questions—"

"They're not foolish. Try again, Mary Lou. Anything. Wait! Did you see those orange-uniformed men with the Black-banner warriors—"

"What is this, a color game or something?"

She still didn't take him seriously, but he ignored the question. "Did you ever notice anyone like that here in this city before?"

"You mean dressed all in orange? N-no—no, I didn't."

ED FELT himself sweating. The lead was there, somewhere, waiting for them to take it up. And it might be their last chance. "Well, knock this around then. All government activity and most business enterprises are carried on by women, right?"

Mary Lou nodded.

"Can you think of one important business organization here which is run by men, maybe a business outfit of some kind?"

Mary Lou smiled. "Sure, that's easy. World-Wide Enterprises, that's what they call themselves. Big business, they'll buy anything from native weaving to pottery to—well, you name it." Mary Lou was still grinning. "A queer outfit. I don't know why I didn't think of them before, because they're mighty peculiar. All the owners are men."

Men, business magnates in a woman's world. First Level tycoons unwilling to accept the strange cultural pattern of a Fourth Level world? It could well be, and Ed's heart began to feel lighter.

"Okay, take me to them!"

"Now?"

"Yes, now."

"Cool off, Ed. It's after midnight, so World-Wide Enterprises are fast asleep for the night."

"I don't care. You're military boss here in Crescent City, aren't you? All right, dream up some excuse to enter the place, just you and me. And I don't mean tomorrow."

Mary Lou shrugged. "Suspicion of alliance with Black-banner city-states. That's easy. Want to go now?"

For answer, Ed grabbed her hand and started running from the still-crowded arena.

MARY LOU took a badge from inside her kirtle-pocket, showed it to the night watchwoman, but the old lady shook her head, planted herself firmly in the long, low doorway. "You got a warrant?"

"I told you this was an emergency," Mary Lou insisted. "Of course, if you want to lose your job and maybe go to jail as well. . . . How do I know you're not involved in this Black-banner thing?"

The woman jumped away as if she'd poked her feet down on a bed of hot coals. "I don't mean no trouble, Miss.

Honest. And if you want to go inside—here, I'll open up."

Mary Lou grumbled her satisfaction, and with Ed she followed the watchwoman inside. Ed whispered, "We'd like to see the owner's quarters."

"That bad, huh? All the way up at the top, mister. You think the boss is a spy?"

"I didn't say that. We just want to see his quarters."

Mary Lou nudged his ribs with her elbow. "I sure hope you know what you're doing."

They followed the watchwoman up a flight of stairs and then across a hallway dimly lit with night lamps. She paused at a doorway, fumbled with a ring of keys at her girdle.

The door swung in noisily, and as it did, bright lights flashed on in the room.

Mary Lou leaped back. "What happened?"

But Ed was smiling at her. "That's easy. The door hit an electric eye, closed an electric circuit. But that's something unknown here on the Fourth Level."

"I hope you realize I don't know what you're talking about."

"Forget it. Point is, I think my hunch is paying off."

Ed's optimism soon received a severe jolt. They found a suite of offices, three elaborately furnished rooms, the chairs and desks and fixtures smelling quite evidently of another world. But that wasn't enough. Ed didn't seek proof of what he already knew. He sought a blue ship which could take them to the First Level. And if he didn't find it. . .

AFTER SHE'D taken them around the offices, the watchwoman demanded: "Well, and did you find what you wanted?"

"As a matter of fact," Ed admitted, "we didn't. But that doesn't mean it isn't here. Has the owner—the big boss himself—got a special retreat here? You know, a little hidden office where he can get away when he wants to be alone; maybe a bar stuck off in the wall somewhere?"

"Well. . ." the old watchwoman began doubtfully.

"Well what?"

"He—listen, mister. He pays me to forget about that; yeah, and to have one o' the char-boys clean it, too. But I can't go poking around and showing it to you."

Mary Lou said, "You got a family?"

"Yes'm."

"Want to keep supporting them?"

"Yes'm."

"Then you'd better show us what we want to see. Get a move on!"

The old woman shrugged, cursed softly under her breath, led them through the first two offices and into the third. She stopped at the far wall, did some tricks with the frame of a rather drab landscape painting.

The wall slid back, revealing a bare room.

Almost bare.

A bank of machinery jutted out from the left-hand wall. What could have been a model of a blue spaceship, certainly no more than two feet long, rested on the floor.

"Nothing here," Mary Lou said. "Except those silly gadgets."

Ed ignored her, spoke instead to the watchwoman. "All right, you can leave us now."

"You mean in there? No sir!"

Ed took her arm, high up, and led her gently from the room. "Look, you'll argue and then you'll agree with us. But we haven't the time. So get out—now!"

The woman grumbled, but she uttered no other protest. And she didn't

resist when Ed parked her outside the hidden office and slid the door back into place from within.

"Now what?" Mary Lou wanted to know.

Ed got down on hands and knees, opened the door of the tiny blue ship. "Might as well have it waiting for us," he muttered.

"You sound as if we can squeeze into that tiny model of—of something."

"There won't be any squeezing at all," Ed assured her as he crossed to the wall. He understood nothing about the complicated bank of machinery, but it did not matter. Protruding from its center was a large lever, and this he pulled all the way home.

Nothing happened. Nothing—except that from far away outside the building, Ed heard the booming drums of a sudden thunderstorm.

A FEW moments later, Mary Lou clutched his hand in fear. "Ed! Ed, I think this room is—growing! How can that be? And yet, and yet—look! The blue thing is as big as you are, and the walls drop back further and further...."

She looked half-hysterical, and Ed tried to comfort her. "I've been through this before, and you have nothing to worry about." He added, under his breath, "I hope." Sure, he'd try to comfort her. But every time this happened, he couldn't prevent the hackles from rising on the back of his neck. And he wouldn't bother to tell Mary Lou the room wasn't growing at all. No, they were shrinking, but probably, she wouldn't believe her eyes either way.

Gigantic now, the blue ship loomed up before them. "We're going inside," Ed told Mary Lou, but she hung back, clearly frightened.

At that moment the door to the office slid open ponderously. A huge fig-

ure stalked inside, flesh wrinkled on the great columns that were legs. The watchwoman!

She looked about for a time, then fell to hands and knees. Her scream was a deep-throated roar, and Ed knew she'd spotted them. A gnarled hand, each finger as big as a man from crown to toe, swept out across the floor and slammed down, inches from them.

"The ship!" Ed cried, pulling at Mary Lou's arm. "Come on!"

"Lord, what's that? A giant, a great, huge—"

"Come on!" Half-dragging her, he led the way toward the ship. The hand swung down again, pounding the floor and shaking them like a miniature earthquake. Maybe the watchwoman didn't recognize them, Ed could not be sure. Perhaps her eyesight was myopic, perhaps she saw two somewhat oversized insects on what should have been a clean floor, and so she wanted to exterminate them....

She changed her tactics, standing up and bringing a tremendous foot down toward them. It slammed against the floor as they scurried away, and then it lifted again.

Ed pushed Mary Lou ahead of him, clambered into the blue ship right behind her, shoved the door shut. He ran to the far wall while the girl cowered in the center of the chamber. He found the first lever of four, depressed it, stood back, panting but happy.

But he felt a giddy, spinning motion, was flung about wildly, colliding with Mary Lou and tumbling in a heap with her against one of the walls.

That hadn't happened before, no! Then did it mean that the watchwoman had raised the ship on high, even now prepared to hurl it away, to crush it against the floor?

Mary Lou was whimpering, but Ed ignored her, climbing to his feet and

running to the string of windows high up on the wall. He peered out, thought he saw the palm of a giant hand. Holding them...

And then, something forced him down flat against the floor, crushing bone to muscle. Acceleration.

As they blasted off the Fourth Level, he wondered dimly if the sudden explosion of energy had killed the old woman.

THE SHIP came to rest in the park-like garden with its stunted trees. First Level, and the ruling world.

Mary Lou was still frightened, but she gained some courage when Ed assured her the journey had ended. She got to her feet doubtfully, but stood far back from the door when he opened it.

Ed walked out confidently—into the arms of three orange-uniformed guards!

"He's the one."

"Yes, no doubt. Matches the Colonel's description. Well, let's take him."

"Careful, he might be dangerous."

Ed struggled furiously, but he'd have had his hands full with any one of the big guards, and the three of them soon had him down on the ground helplessly.

They did not know of Mary Lou, and Ed smiled grimly when the warrior-maid launched herself from the ship, her sword brandished high overhead. For all her slim grace, Mary Lou's tremendous strength might turn the tide.

One of the guards rose, parried her sword arm as it came down. The weapon clattered away, and Mary Lou struck out with her fists. Her right hand landed flush on the man's jaw, but he shook it off without any trouble, and soon he'd slung a dazed Mary Lou over one shoulder, and for all her writhing and kicking, she could not do

a thing about it.

Ed couldn't believe his eyes, not immediately. And then he remembered what the hag had told him. Something on their Fourth Level world makes the women strong. But Mary Lou was out of her element, and whatever unknown radiation played about that Fourth Level Earth did not exist here or anywhere else. Mary Lou was just an ordinary girl now, and a very bewildered one.

Mary Lou still clawed and bit and kicked as they led her away. Two guards prodded Ed along warily in front of them, their strange pistols in their hands. The third still carried Mary Lou over his shoulder and, walking thus, they came to the long low building Ed remembered from his last visit.

In five minutes, they stood before Colonel Utgard, a coldly handsome man, impeccably attired in his orange uniform. He scowled darkly, said: "I never have any rest here. I gave you men orders. Why didn't you carry them out?"

"Here are your prisoners, sir."

"I DID not request prisoners. I distinctly told you to kill this man at once if he appeared."

"Sir," one of the guards apologized, "we respect your orders. On the other hand, Colonel Welcome has been firm about this thing too. The Regent wants to review—"

"I don't care what the Regent wants! I gave you orders, and I'll have you stripped of your rank if—"

"Sir, the Regent—"

"You're demoted, all of you! Better still, I'll see you before a tribunal of your peers. I'll—"

On and on ranted the Colonel, a bitter, resentful, angry man. He almost seemed like a mechanical figure, with but one purpose in life—and that to

be evil. Too mechanical. It struck Ed that way, oddly. Something didn't fit....

"...you have one alternative," Utgard was saying. "Kill him now, and kill this girl as well."

There was silence. The guards shuffled about uncomfortably, their pistols raised.

Suddenly, Utgard moved. He tore the weapon from one of the guards hands, swung about with it and faced Ed. "So you perish—" he said, and fired.

Ed dove in, felt something hiss over his head, a seething stream of raw energy. Then he was grappling with Utgard and together they crashed into a desk, plunged to the floor, rolled over.

One of the guards would have stopped them, but his companions held him back. Said one, "The Regent would like it better this way. Don't you think he'd blame us if this man were killed in cold blood? I say let them fight."

And thus they fought. Utgard seemed possessed of an inhuman strength, ripping blow after blow into Ed's face with his free hand, clinging to the pistol with his other hand. Ed fought defensively, used all the strength at his command to keep the weapon averted. But Utgard forced him down and back, bringing the pistol in toward him. Closer...

The crushing acceleration had left Ed weak, had tired his muscles with the tremendous burden forced upon them. Now he kicked out with his legs, saw Utgard totter above him for a moment, then fall away. The weapon went off, hissing into the floor and carving a chunk out of it.

Ed threw himself on top of the Colonel, struck out with his fist, heard the pistol clatter away. They both scrambled after it, reached it together.

This time Ed got it, heard Mary Lou shout triumphantly. But Utgard reared back and kicked him as he crouched on the floor, the toe of his sandled foot catching Ed's abdomen and forcing all the air from his lungs. Lances of pain coursed up and down his body, streaked red before his eyes. His limbs felt numb as Utgard swung down at him again.

Somehow he caught the foot, twisted. Utgard tumbled down beside him. Ed swung the gun up, brought it down on the man's head. Over and over again he raised his hand and let it fall, the heavy weapon pounding against Utgard's skull. Over and over...

"STOP IT, Ed! L-look—" Mary Lou crouched by them, fear in her eyes. "I said, look!"

Ed blinked, tried to rise. He couldn't make it, not quite. But he saw what had been Utgard.

The skull was impossibly crushed, dented, broken—but no blood covered it.

No blood...

And dents which looked like dents in metal, under a thin coat of what could have been artificial skin!

Still dazed, he ripped away Utgard's orange shirt, saw under it only gleaming metal.

Even the guards cowered in one end of the room. One of them shook his head from side to side numbly. "I don't get it. I don't get it."

Neither did Ed.

LATER, HE stood before the Regent, Freya's hand in his. They'd put Freya back through their device—whatever it was—which had taken her memory from her and put a new one in its place. The process had been reversed, and Freya remembered only as a dream all that had happened since

that evening with Bob and Judy Hendrix.

Torstein and Mary Lou stood there too, gazing into each other's eyes, refusing to see anything else, very much in love.

The Regent's high voice spoke a glowing tribute to them, to all of them, told them that the past was forgotten, that Freya could return to the world where she'd spent her entire life. As for Tor and Mary Lou, he said they could decide for themselves where they would prefer to remain. Of Colonel Utgard he mentioned not a word, and presently he drew the interview to a close.

Outside, Colonel Welcome met them, took Ed's hand and shook it heartily. "My boy, you've done it!" he shouted.

Ed nodded. "Yeah. Yeah, I guess so. But I don't understand..."

"You mean about the late Colonel Utgard? That's easy. Remember that talk about his grandfather, the one who'd caused all the trouble in the first place?"

"Yes."

"That was Utgard, his grandfather!"

"I don't get it."

"Look: the grandfather disappeared. He didn't die. He just disappeared. Fifty years later, a younger edition of him returned, claimed to be his grandson. Only—it was a lie.

"The original Utgard had caused a lot of trouble and knew it. Also, he'd passed the prime of life, and he wanted to do something about it. There's a Third Level world—not your own, naturally—where the natives know how to build robots. Not just mechanical toys, but synthetic men of metal, metal bodies that can last hundreds of years.

"Utgard had one fashioned for himself. That was the man you fought with and destroyed—a robot. Further, the original Utgard was bad enough according to the records, but this man

was worse! Why? Because there exists one flaw in the robots. Human character is not transferred perfectly to the metal bodies. Something is lost. That is, the main trait of the individual becomes the only trait in the new metal man. So Utgard, who claimed to be his own grandson, was all bad. A hundred per cent evil..."

WELL, THAT was just the last of a long string of improbabilities, and Ed couldn't doubt it. He shrugged. "The hell with it," he said aloud.

"What say?" Freya demanded.

"I said I want to forget all about this."

Torstein grinned. "That won't be easy, especially since they'll be opening inter-dimensional travel for our Earth. The Regent wants you in charge of it, you know."

"Me? What about you? I thought both of us—"

Torstein was still grinning. "There are complications, Ed. You see, Mary Lou wants to return to her own world, and you can't blame her, not if she's strong as a man there, and just an ordinary girl elsewhere. But you and Freya can visit us whenever you want."

"That's crazy!" Ed cried. "You can't leave this whole job in my hands, teaching Earth how to fare among the parallel worlds."

"Sorry, I said you can visit us. Mary Lou insists."

Ed smiled in spite of himself. Maybe with Freya's help he could get Earth ready for its new role, and anyway, looking at Mary Lou, he knew there was a girl to tame the wild Viking in Torstein's nature.

"I tell you what," Ed suggested. "We'll compromise, like the old hag, remember? You're getting married, we're getting married. Let's spend our honeymoon on the hag's world. She'd like that. Then, afterwards, we'll see

about all this."

Torstein nodded. Then, when Mary Lou poked her elbow against his ribcase: "That is, if it's all right with Mary Lou."

She smiled up at him, said she agreed.

Ed squeezed Freya's hand. "It's been a long time, kid. It's—"

His musing was interrupted by Freya's arms thrown around his neck, her lips pressed to his in a passionate

embrace.

"Oh darling, let Mary Lou boss Tor. With us—let's go back to our own Earth and be just like we always were."

"You'll get no argument from me there," Ed promised, "and once a year we can fly over and watch Mary Lou and Tor stage a match." He winked at her before his lips found hers again.

THE END

MAN: GENIUS OR — ?

FROM OUR vantage point of twentieth century civilization, surrounded by the abundance of technology, we're inclined to look askance at the ancient and primitive cultures which preceded ours. Science has changed the world, we say, completely and ineradicably. Well, that's true, but by no means can we have contempt for our early predecessors, including ancient man. His innovations were, to his culture, as startling in their way, as ours.

The degree of intelligence necessary to conceive of and construct say, a bow or a sling, is high. The experimental method of trial and error modified these weapons with time, until basically they changed very little. On a more ethereal level we have the creation of the alphabet, no mean accomplishment when you think how well it has served us—and with what little change.

Engineering achievements were likewise of a high order. In the Middle East today,

archeologists have been uncovering tunnels, water mains, and structures worked in solid rock. Examination has disclosed that except for speed, these works were as well executed and planned as a modern operation. In tunnel drilling alone, starting from opposite ends over a course of a thousand feet at Hebiz, the early technicians with their little knowledge of geometry and trigonometry succeeded in meeting with hardly a margin of error.

Our own accomplishments may seem primitive to the civilizations of say two thousand years from now. But the scientists and historians of that time will undoubtedly have high respect for what we did, considering what we had. "How," they'll ask, "did the ancients ever drill that ten mile tunnel in solid rock without an atomic blaster?" Or "How did they go from one place to another without a personal anti-grav?"

— by John Barry

WHAT HAPPENED AT ENIWETOK

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● By E. BRUCE YACHES

WITH THE whole world "hell-bomb"-conscious, the recent release of pictures and information describing new atomic explosions on the Pacific Island of Eniwetok has stirred up a babble of interesting speculation. The military is keeping its mouth shut of course, and the AEC gives out nothing but platitudes. Nevertheless it is apparent that tremendous strides have been made in developing atomic energy as an explosive. Certainly the atomic bomb exploded there was fully ten times as pow-

erful as the Hiroshima bomb (no mean accomplishment in itself).

But, more important, the hydrogen bomb may have had its birth there, though this is fairly well denied. Thermo-nuclear energy could have been released in the form of a "miniature" of the planned hydrogen bomb, since final tests usually are preceded by pilot-plant jobs. It is firmly agreed that the hydrogen bomb—even theoretically—will require a triggering or setting-off by a conventional uranium bomb.

The hydrogen transformation needs incredible temperatures for its initiation and these exist in only one place on Earth, that is, in the core of an atomic bomb at the moment of explosion—within those micro-seconds.

The Eniwetok tests of the new bomb were made in the conventional way; everything was handled by robotic instruments and complete observations were taken. The gigantic mushroomed after-effect came into being, as well as the increasing sphere of light. These effects may also be associated with the hydrogen bomb.

Animal tests were also made and, as usual, the fearsome depredations of radioactivity were noted. But by now one interesting fact clearly emerges. Atomic bombs exploded in the air do not produce enduring radioactive effects such as would occur if radioactive dust were dropped or if the bomb had been exploded under water. The air explosion at Eniwetok did not con-

taminate the area for more than a short period of time, and technicians moved in within hours or days to their appointed tasks of examination. This fact has been known since Hiroshima, and it is important that everyone understand it to prevent blind panic in the event of the atomic bombing of our cities. In a phrase, atomic bombing is handled (in the rescue work) much like ordinary bombing. Radioactivity of the lingering variety does not seem to be a major problem. This could be radically altered, of course, for a city sprayed with sea or lake water by a bomb dropped in its harbor.

Whatever happened at Eniwetok certainly enriched knowledge, but what its eventual price will be to us, no one can even guess. As one atomic scientist remarked, repeating an old saw, "...as for the bomb, we're damned if we make it, and we're damned if we don't!"—And he meant that statement literally and reverently.

LOOK OUT BELOW!

By FRANK CAIN

THE EARTH is being grazed or buzzed continually by meteoric chunks of matter. Like an aircraft diving on a house, like a pilot buzzing his girl friend's car, these astronomical wanderers swoop down toward the Earth in vast parabolic orbits from the farthest reaches of interplanetary or interstellar space. They pass near, their energy of motion so great as to overcome gravitation, and in long graceful sweeps they go back into the infinite from where they came.

Usually these "buzzers" or "sweepers" are small bits of matter rarely larger than a mile or two in diameter, more often smaller than that. Their detection is mostly a matter of chance. Astronomers may make a series of photographs of the same spot in the sky night after night. An examination of the plates discloses a series of streaks. Subsequent calculation and telescopic observation confirm the discovery of one of these buzzers. Though small they are able to be seen because they come in so close, often well within the orbit of the Moon—at a distance of less than two hundred and fifty thousand miles.

"Radio-astronomy" hasn't yet been used to locate them because they do not emit radio waves and direct radars haven't been built to reach that far out into space. But it is the next step. Astronomers are finding that a study of radio waves and pulses that come from space tell a good deal about the nature of the emitting sources. A lot of energy and effort is now going into this "radio-astronomy." The

next development will be the construction of super-radars similar to the one which pulsed a beam to the Moon a few years ago.

When this is done, the space surrounding the Earth can be probed and tested for small objects, like the "buzzers", at will and accurately, for radar apparatus can detect very feeble interferences in its beam, those whose direct reflection is too feeble to pick up. The knowledge of these visitors to our part of space is in no way discouraging to eventual space travel. It is necessary to keep in mind the scarcity of their numbers and the inconceivable vastness of space itself. There is no chance at all of a rocket being hit by these babies! Rocketeers will have their worries with much lesser meteorites and meteors than the buzzers.

Much speculation has taken place on what damage could be caused if such a planetoid were to strike the Earth in some populated spot. Naturally, it would be terrific as we can guess from the craters left by the few meteorites which have been big enough not to be vaporized by the protective atmosphere. But in terms of chance and probability, there is almost no possibility of this ever occurring. Which is a good thing, for one of these bodies could easily vaporize a city. Somehow, Nature has seen fit to prevent their wide-spread distribution. Nevertheless, there are enough to provide astronomers with an interesting and informative side-show, from which a good deal of information on speeds and distances can be gleaned.



Once again, the little creeps came out of the moulding, row upon row of them, and moved inexorably across the floor to the ancient phonograph!

THE LITTLE CREEPS

By Walter M. Miller, Jr.



You think wars are won on the field of battle? Not always so: the decision sometimes comes out of the woodwork!

WHEN HE turned out the light, the little creeps began coming down the wall again. General Horrey gurgled and fumbled for the bed-lamp chain. Brilliance flooded the room, and they vanished instantly. But the feeling of their presence lingered; it was as if they were watching him from the crack beneath the moulding. He sat up in bed, breathing deeply and glaring at

the wall.

His wife's angular body stirred beside him. She rolled over and blinked first at the lamp, then at the general. "I thought you were sleepy, Clement," she challenged with a frown.

He quickly took note of the fact that she hadn't seen them. He tossed her a nervous smile. "I—I thought I'd read awhile," he mumbled.

"Why, you don't even have a book."

He swung his stout body out of bed, padded to the shelf, and returned with a volume of Klausewitz. Her colorless, middle-aged face went slack with hurt.

"Clemen-*n-n-nt*, on our first night together again?"

Her own boldness caught in her throat. She blushed furiously, flopped herself over, and curled up with her face to the wall. She drew the bedclothes tightly about her neck.

The general smiled a sickly smile. For the first time he noticed that she had taken down her tired brown hair and had tied it loosely behind her head with a thin white ribbon. He tried to frame an apt speech—*Really, Nora, aren't we a little old?* But he also framed the answer—*Yes, if you count the years we've been apart.*

He thought briefly: maybe I should tell her about the little creeps that come down from the attic. But he dispelled the notion with a shudder. Telling people about the little creeps had already won him a transfer from the battlefield back to Tokyo. It had also won him a chronic seizure of psychoanalysis, with daily spasms in the staff dispensary. It had won him permission to bring his wife to Japan, on the theory that her presence would have therapeutic value for him. But it might get him a medical discharge if he weren't careful about it.

Nora's bags were still at the airport. If he told her about the little creeps, she wouldn't even have to pack. Still, he could not turn out the light and watch them start crawling down the wall again.

He eased himself back into bed. "Are you asleep, Nora?" he whispered hopefully.

Her head quivered negatively. He watched her glumly for a moment. Horrey was fond of his wife. Lord

knows, she had been a patient soul during all those army years—a trifle unimaginative, perhaps—but gentle and devoted. He hated to see her hurt.

Quietly he bent over her and planted a small kiss on her temple. She disregarded it. He caught a faint whiff of perfume. She never wore perfume, and she always rolled her hair at night. Horrey felt suddenly worse. He had not imagined that she would consider their reunion such a special event.

HE SIGHED and turned his attention to Klausewitz. He meant to read until she went to sleep, and then leave the light on all night. He left it on every night. He had even painted the windowpanes black so that the air-raid wardens wouldn't spot it. The little creeps were regular comers, but he had hoped against hope that Nora's presence would drive them away.

Now what was he to do? The bed lamp would eventually have to be explained to Nora. In small matters, particularly those pertaining to his personal behavior, she was a very inquisitive woman.

He attacked Klausewitz fiercely. The dull words danced before his eyes. He devoured each of them like a separate pill that had to be taken. Then he went back and scanned the lines for sense. He found none. He became angry with his mind for its lack of discipline.

"Are you asleep yet?" he breathed.

"How can I go to sleep," she mumbled, "with you whispering at me every two minutes?"

But after a long time she went to sleep. Horrey bent over her and listened to the slow breathing, and watched the slight quiver of her thin lip. Satisfied, he laid the book quietly aside, and eased himself down beneath the covers with a sigh. He was

used to sleeping with a light burning two feet from his face. It was reassuring.

General Horrey began to doze. Nora was stirring restlessly, but her presence soothed him. Suddenly she rolled over and snorted impatiently. Horrey kept his eyes closed. Then he heard the rattle of the bed-lamp chain --and the room plunged into darkness.

Stiffness shot through him. His hand twitched toward the lamp. He pulled it back. The darkness pressed upon him. He opened his eyes slowly and watched the night.

Then it happened.

The little creeps began coming down the wall again. They seeped from beneath the moulding and oozed over the plaster in downpouring waves of pale green phosphorescence. Tiny luminous rods, no larger than a pin, they moved like inchworms—arching their bodies and drawing their tails up behind them, then lurching ahead with a mechanical jerk. They marched in ranks, hundreds abreast, and they made concentric contour lines on the wall. In total effect, they reminded him of elite *Sturmtruppen* goosestepping down the *Kaiser Wilhelmstrasse*. But theirs was a slow crawl, hardly faster than the second-hand of his watch.

The room was pitch-black save for their faint luminescence. He longed to turn on the light. They hated light. It gobbled them up. But then he would have to explain to Nora.

A great hopelessness came over him, like the desperation of a trapped patrol. His jaw tightened with quiet hate. Every night they plagued him. Real or unreal, they had all but wrecked his career. They were driving him slowly mad. And now they threatened his marital happiness, if he had any.

SLOWLY he sat up in bed. "I'll fight them," he thought. "I'll let them come for once, and then I'll squash them!" Why hadn't he thought of it before?

He had tried to fight them with booby traps. He had sealed the moulding with putty. He had fumigated the attic. He had sprayed the wall with insecticides. In desperation, he had sprinkled it with holy water. And as a last resort, he had called in a Shinto priest to exorcise the house. Nothing had helped. But he had never stood up and fought them like a man.

The frontal ranks were halfway down the wall now, and an attacking spearhead veered slightly off to the left—strangely—away from the bed. General Horrey arose quietly and tiptoed out of the room. He fumbled in the kitchen cabinets, searching for a spray gun and a fly swatter.

"If Doctor Sikiewitz could see me now!" he thought glumly.

Sikiewitz had been forced to the conclusion that General Horrey was having hallucinations about hallucinations, because Horrey freely admitted that the visions were unreal, and the doctor could not understand a patient who lacked faith in his own apparitions. In Sikiewitz' book, a man was never mad if he thought that he was mad. And Horrey had him puzzled. "You are only imagining that you are imagining," was his ultimate conclusion. "A hypochondriac who only imagines he is a hypochondriac." This tail-in-its-mouth diagnosis impressed the general, but left him bewildered.

"I must be getting worse," he whispered as he carried his weapons back to the bedroom.

He stopped in the doorway to frown. The wall was glowing with them now, but the entire army had swung around to follow the southern

spearhead which had become a long thin tendril reaching toward a table in the corner. He hated them fiercely, but fear had left him.

Hate pushed him slowly toward them. Gripping the spray-gun, he advanced. Nora was weaving a small intermittent snore on the bed. He pushed the gun toward the advancing column and worked the plunger furiously. The wall became wet with insecticide. But the little creeps marched impeccably onward, seemingly unaware of the gas attack.

Suppose they jump me, he thought. Suppose the whole swarming glow of them rush over to gnaw me to the bone. "Hellspawns!" he grunted.

He set the spray gun aside and took aim with the swatter. What if it angers them? What if they come at me in a mighty crawling slimy rage?

Whack! The weapon slapped hard against the plaster. A bright spark and a crackle! The swatter's copper screen glowed dull red when he pulled it back. But the little creeps continued their inexorable march. With a nervous moan, he continued belting them—until the wire curled up like wilted wet paper. Each time, the spark. He dropped the useless weapon across the foot of the bed. Nora's snoring broke its cadence; she groaned and tossed. He held his breath until she snored again.

THE LITTLE creeps were crawling over the top of the corner table now, and the tendril split into two columns. One wriggled its way up the side of the small radio-phonograph combination. The other moved around in back of the chassis. Horrey backed slowly away, amazed at their behavior. Had their objective always been the radio?

He glanced at the moulding. The influx had stopped. The wall was swarming with their thousands, but

no new battalions emerged from the woodwork. And the entire army was moving toward the corner.

"I'll wait," he thought. "I'll give them rope, lengthen their supply lines, learn their battle plan." He sat on the edge of the foot locker to watch.

Some of the little creeps were marching through a ventilator slit and into the radio chassis. Others were pouring over the side of the record changer. The lid was up, and he could see them assembling on the turn-table. Vaguely, he wondered if any known species of worms laid their eggs in vacuum tubes.

After a few minutes, the last of them had entered the set. The regiment in the record player began climbing the pick-up arm and moving toward the head. They collected there like bright bees swarming on a limb.

Inspiration struck him. "I'll turn on the set and fry them," he whispered.

But before he could move, their phantom glow began pulsating slightly, growing fainter. Then he saw that they were soaking into the very metal. He covered his face with his hands, groaned, and muttered, "Sikiewitz was right."

A sudden click made him look up. The dial lights came on. The tube filaments cast their faint red glow on the wall behind the set. The turn-table creaked once; it was spinning, but the pick-up arm remained on its hook. General Horrey gurgled and backed away. His .45 hung in its usual place on the bedpost. He fumbled and groped and finally got it from the holster. Quietly, he charged a round into the chamber, intending to shoot at the radio. But a faint buzz of static made him hesitate.

"It would be foolish to shoot," came a hissing voice from the loud-speaker. "Then we would have to enter directly into your nervous system.

It would be most painful to you."

Cold chills tickled the general's nape. He stood poised in his pajamas, with the gun pointed at the floor. At last he wiped small perspiration from his forehead, and whispered, "I request a parley."

"Granted," hissed the little creeps.

Slowly he advanced toward the set. The open lid of the record-player was a shadowy crocodile's jaw, waiting to devour him. He moved a chair noiselessly in front of it and sat down, placing the automatic beside him. He was stiffly at attention.

"Who are you?" he breathed.

There was a brief pause, then: "Our name is 2537 Angstroms."

The words were puzzling, but he was more baffled by the very fact of speech itself.

"How do you talk? How do worms speak?"

"By vibrating the phonograph crystal."

"Why do you pick on me?" he demanded plaintively. "Why me?"

"Our analysis has shown that you are the key."

The answer meant nothing to him. "Where do you come from? I fumigated the attic."

"We are speaking from tomorrow."

The general caught his breath. His lip quivered angrily. He was not a man to be trifled with, not even by a phantasmagorical tribe of worms. "Tomorrow, eh?" His military mind groped ahead and found a leading question. "Where were you yesterday?"

"We were at today."

"Ha!" he breathed triumphantly. "But I was here today, and you weren't."

"True. While you are at today, we are at tomorrow."

"You lie!" he purred. "I'm coming to tomorrow pretty soon, and I'll

prove you aren't there."

"When you reach tomorrow, it will be your today. But we will still be at tomorrow."

He groped again, and drew a blank. He sat working his jaw angrily. "What are your terms? What do you want? I demand that you leave my apartment!"

"Tomorrow grows out of today," the little creeps muttered ominously. "We demand that you stop spoiling tomorrow."

"Stop spoil—" Horrey began sputtering.

A groan came from the bed. Nora had stopped snoring. "Turndroffradio," she mumbled sleepily.

There was a brief silence. Then the little creeps whispered again: "Our demands are simple. There are only three of them. Do not fire Yoshigura. Do not listen to General Yaney. Do not approve the bombing of towns along the Amur."

HORREY LET an angry silence pass. Could the little creeps be some new secret weapon of the Reds? What could they know of General Yaney? The man was at the front, and Horrey hadn't seen him in months. And he had heard of no requests for strategic attacks along the Amur River. And what of Yoshigura? Yoshigura was only his housekeeper. And he had never thought of firing the man.

"Why?" he finally asked.

"Tomorrow grows out of today. Those are key decisions you must make."

"And if I agree? Will you leave me alone?"

"That depends on day-after-tomorrow."

Horrey snorted. "What if I refuse? What can you do about it?"

"Then we will be forced to go back and change yesterday."

"Turndamndradio off, Clement,"

came the mumble from the bed.

"I'll think it over," the general muttered to the set.

"Turnitoff, Clement."

"There is nothing to think about. We shall return again to see that our demands are met." The radio lights switched off. The little creeps began emerging.

"Who said that?" Nora gasped. "Is somebody else here?" She sat bolt upright in bed.

She jerked on the bed lamp, catching the little creeps in the process of emerging. They seeped quickly back into the metal to escape the light.

"Hah!" Horrey growled triumphantly. "Now you can't get out. You're trapped!"

"What can't get out, Clement? Who's trapped?" Nora's voice was shrill with nervousness.

The radio came on again. "Turn out the light, please," ordered the little creeps.

Nora's hand darted toward the chain, then froze. "Whoo—"

"Don't touch it, Nora!" he barked.

"Clement! What—"

"Somebody's playing pranks with our radio," he said hastily. "Leave the light on."

"Tell the female to remove the light," the little creeps commanded.

"No!"

"Who called me a female?"

"Very well," said the loudspeaker.

"I trust you have an extra fuse." A shower of sparks suddenly sputtered from the back of the set.

The light winked out instantly. Nora screamed in the darkness, and the general began cursing fluently. The little creeps oozed out of the cabinet and began inching their way up the wall. They were glowing brighter now, and moving faster than before.

"Do you see them Nora?" he shouted hopefully. "See them?"

"Who? Where?" she cried. "I don't

see anyone, Clement!"

"There! In the corner! On the wall!"

"I—I—I—don't see anything!" Her voice was a sobbing wail. "Where are you, Clement?"

"You heard them!" he bellowed. "You've got to see them!" He lifted the automatic and aimed at the head of the column. "They're—right—there!" He jerked the trigger.

The explosion was shattering. When Nora's scream died out, plaster was sifting to the floor. The little creeps were still writhing from the brief flash of the shot. The bullet had done no damage to them, but they didn't like the light. He laughed wildly and fired again, and again.

WHEN THE gun was empty, the little creeps began reassembling. He started out of the room, meaning to replace the fuse and give them a good dose of light. Then he realized that he didn't know the location of the box. He had never bothered to find it.

Nora was moaning occasionally.

"You see them?" he panted.

"You've just got to see them!"

She didn't answer. He groped to the bed and felt for her arm. "Nora, Nora!" He found the arm and shook it. "Nora, answer me."

Only a moan. She had fainted. He dropped the arm and lumbered to the kitchen for a handful of matches. He began looking for the fuse box, searching each room in turn. By the time he found it in an unused linen closet, the little creeps had returned to the moulding.

A loud knocking was worrying at the front door. General Horrey ignored it while he shorted the fuse socket with a coin. Since no fire sputtered from the radio, he assumed the short had been a transient one. He found some ammonia in the medicine chest

and went to wave it under his wife's nose.

Her first words were: "They're at the door now, Clement!"

"It's all over," he said gently. "Go back to sleep. Would you like a drink?"

"I hear them at the door."

"That's somebody wondering about the shooting. They'll go away. Just relax."

"Who was it, Clement?"

"Didn't you hear them?"

"I thought it was the radio."

"With a microphone? Where were they standing?"

"Not standing, Nora!" he groaned. "Didn't you see them? Answer me!"

She looked worried. "I—I—oh, maybe I did."

His heart leaped with glee. "You did? What did they look like?"

She frowned, as if struggling to remember. "I—I think he was a huge, dark-faced man—standing just outside the window."

General Horrey groaned inwardly. He started to bellow at her that there wasn't any man, but he set his jaw tightly. Let her believe the invention of her own imagination, he thought. It was safer that way.

The knocking ceased for a time, then recurred at the back door. He slipped on a robe and stalked to answer it. A shadow stood on the steps, bowing politely. After a moment of peering into the darkness, he recognized the shadow as his clean-up man—Yoshigura, who lived in his basement.

"All right, what do you want?" he snapped.

Yoshigura's voice as a hesitant purr: "Ah, you shoot at thief, perhaps—Generar sir?"

"Yeah, I shoot at thief perhaps. Go back to bed."

"Ah, ah yes. Sir, you wish servant to bring Yapanese undertaker now

perhaps? To care for thief's remains?"

The general snorted impatiently. "It wasn't a burglar; it was only a cat." "Ahhh, a ca-a-at! Yesss! Perhaps Generar wish Yoshigura to dispose of cat's remains, yes sir?"

"Go back to bed! I missed the damn cat! Is that what you want to hear?"

"Ah so?" Yoshigura bowed gravely. "Is too bad. Perhaps cat was only the rittew creeps, yes?"

THE GENERAL choked and started to slam the door. But he paused, his hand clutching angrily at the knob. When he had first hired Yoshigura, he had called the man upstairs one night before he turned out the light—in the hope that the Japanese would also see the army of glow-worms. Yoshigura not only failed to see the little creeps, but he also began treating Horrey with a peculiar and overly familiar deference. Now it was the servant's toothy grin that gave Horrey pause.

"Didn't I tell you to go back to bed?" he growled.

The servant bowed again. "Ah, so? Ah, Yoshigura not sleepy. Is good time for Generar to discuss sarary increase, yes?"

"Salary! Now see here! You go—"

"Ah ah! Is perhaps best Yoshigura should speak to authorities of creep-cats that bother general, yes. Perhaps authorities exterminate creep-cats."

Horrey tightened himself into rigid fury. "Why, you scummy little black-mailer! Pack up and get out. You're through!"

The servant lost his grin. "So! You want Yoshigura to inform big general boss—"

"I don't give a tinker's damn if you do or don't!" he bellowed. "My wife was a witness to it! Now, get out of my house."

Yoshigura looked suddenly, frightened. "Ah, is perhaps my mistake—"

"You're damned right it is!" he roared. "I don't go for blackmail, boy. You're fired! And be out of here before noon in the morning."

Yoshigura stiffened. He backed down one step, then bowed. "Is too bad. This time is your mistake, General. Yesss." His voice was quietly ominous. He turned and skulked angrily into the darkness.

For a long moment, Horrey stared after him. Something scratchy was gnawing at his throat—a strange dryness. He had just fired Yoshigura! And the little creeps said...

He shivered and went back to bed. Nora was miserably frightened. He spent several minutes convincing her that the "burglar" would not return. Then he turned out the light. The little creeps remained in the moulding; they had already spoken their piece.

The smell of frying bacon awoke him. Nora was already in the kitchen. In the gray light of morning, his memory of the little creeps was like the fuzzy recollection of a nightmare.

"Have you had prowlers before?" Nora asked anxiously when he came to the kitchen for breakfast.

HE NOTICED the dark circles under her eyes and guessed that she had remained awake for the rest of the night. "They won't come again," he said. "Don't worry about it." He meant to break the radio and pull out the plug. Then she wouldn't be aware of their presence. Or better still—

"Nora, an electrician's coming today to check the wiring. Let him in, will you?"

It was one of those rare inspirations that struck suddenly. He gloated about it on the way to headquarters. As soon as he was in his office, he called the administrative officer at

general mess.

"Colonel, I believe you folks have germicidal lamps in your meat-coolers, don't you? You do? Fine! I need a spare tube. I'll send somebody to pick one up. Thanks."

Chuckling to himself, he made three more calls and finally located a fluorescent fixture. Then he called for an electrician.

"Sergeant, as a personal favor—would you do some work for me today? It's out of the line of duty, so I'll pay you for the service. Pick up a fixture at Terrence's office, and a germicidal lamp at general mess. Install it in my bedroom for me, huh?"

The electrician frowned and scratched his head. "You got a shield with the fixture?"

"What for?"

"You can get radiation burns from them things, sir. Bad on the eyes."

"Why, you can't even see ultraviolet."

"I know sir. You can't see it, but 2537 Angstroms is still hard on the eyes."

"Twenty-five which?"

"Wavelength of the black-light mercury line, sir."

"Oh. Something about that number sounds familiar," Horrey muttered. "Well, if it doesn't have a shield, get a tinner to make you one."

"Yes sir. I'll get on it this afternoon, sir. I'm off duty."

"Thank you, Sergeant."

THE GENERAL was thoroughly pleased with himself. The ultraviolet lamp wouldn't keep Nora awake, and it could be easily explained as a cold-preventer. He hoped fervently that the little creeps would be as sensitive to one kind of light as to another. If so, he would have them permanently beaten.

At nine o'clock, an armed courier brought the reports of yesterday's air-

strikes, along with a folder from Intelligence. The intelligence report was entitled "Analysis of New Manchurian-Siberian Power Facilities." Horrey began thumbing through the latter immediately. He had been anxiously awaiting the report for several days.

But after reading for five minutes, the general was becoming slightly nervous. The words "Amur River" occurred a dozen times in the first three pages. His mind drifted to recollections: *Do not fire Yoshigura... Do not approve the bombing of towns along the Amur... Tomorrow grows out of today... Our analysis has shown that you are the key.*

"Nonsense!" he snorted, turning his attention back to the report.

The gist of the whole thing was contained in the second paragraph: "It becomes evident that the Amur hydroelectric stations are working with Siberian steam-turbine installations on a cooperative basis. The two-hundred-mile belt along the river is undergoing considerable industrial expansion. The daytime power-demands of the belt are beyond the combined normal output of Siberian turbines and Manchurian hydroelectrics. Yet, these installations are handling the load. This is accomplished by a supply-timing schedule. At night, during the low demand period, the hydroelectrics are shut down. During this period the turbines take over, while the dams build up head. Then, during the heavy day-loading, they operate together, the hydroelectrics generating at nearly double-duty, thus exhausting the water-head by nightfall."

The general laid the report aside and leaned back to stare at the ceiling. Other staff-members were reading the report. Before the day was over, somebody was going to want a decision. And it would be hard to decide. Because of the cooperative power

situation, it would be easy to cripple the "neutral" Siberian industry by blasting the Manchurian dams. But the river was a border. One bomb on the wrong side of the line might bring another nation into the wrong side of the war. The final decision was up to the Commanding General, but Horrey's advice would count as a vote.

"I think I'll abstain," he muttered sarcastically to the ceiling.

"Sir?"

He glanced up to see his WAC secretary standing in the doorway. "Nothing, Sergeant," he grunted. "You want something?"

"General Yaney to see you, sir."

"Who—?" Horrey felt himself going white.

"General Yaney, sir. He's back from the—." Sergeant Agnes gurgled as a paper clip popped against the seat of her tight-packed skirt. She reddened furiously and rubbed her wound, then glared angrily at the short grinning man who slipped past her, idly flipping a rubber band.

"No girdle, huh?" he whispered. "I thought it was real. Good for you."

AGNES STALKED away in a fury. General Yaney closed the door and tossed his hat at Horrey's desk. It skidded into the wastebasket and he left it there.

"Howdy, Clem," he said with a bright grin. "Don't look so petrified. I'm real."

Horrey thawed himself out with a murmur and came around the desk to shake hands. He smiled, but his heart wasn't in it. "How're you, Jim? And what on earth—"

"Am I doing in Tokyo?" Yaney planted his foot on a chair, his elbow on his knee, and his chin on his fist. "Is your sergeant married?" he asked with a wink.

"I don't know, Jim. What are you

doing here?"

"What's her name, Clem?"

Horrey snorted. His eyes flickered briefly to Yaney's command-pilot wings. "You're too far back of the lines to date enlisted women, Jim. The M.P.'s would grab her. Let her alone and answer my question."

"Huh! I don't know any WAC generals. Besides, it might be amusing to tangle with the cops. Haven't been run in since I was a second looie."

"Jim, what—?"

"Oh, all right!" General Yaney removed his foot from the chair and sat down. "I came back with that intelligence report, Clem. I know some things that aren't in there."

"You?" How come? Since when do you have sources of—"

"I don't. I got the info from the man that wrote the report. We powwowed and decided to keep it off the record so it wouldn't get to Washington."

Horrey returned to his desk, frowning. "What made you do that?" he grunted disapprovingly.

The young air officer went serious. "Look, Clem, I know you're an old timer—everything above-board and all that. But this is something special. If Washington gets it, the State Department might foul the works."

"Better tell me about it."

"It's just this. We know the Amur River is mined—on the Siberian side. The mines are lined up like a bomb pattern. They're set to go off on an impulse from microphonic detonators across the river. If there's an explosion on the south bank, there'll be another explosion on the north bank. If we lay a bomb pattern down the south side of the river, another pattern will appear on the north side."

Horrey began sputtering unbelief.

"It's true, Clem. They planted the mines secretly. Liquidated the labor-

ers on the job—all except one. One escaped. He was our informant. Do you see what it means?"

Horrey let a long silence prevail. Then he nodded slowly. "If it's true, an enemy camera man could film the raid from up the river. It would look like we violated Siberian territory. Very effective propaganda. But what about their own installations? Won't they destroy—?"

Yaney shook his head gravely. "They've arranged the mines very cleverly. They won't destroy anything important. Just a few thousand Siberian citizens."

HORREY whistled thoughtfully. "I can see how we'd better not risk it."

"Now wait!" Yaney hitched his chair closer to the desk. "If the staff approves my plan, we can turn the tables on them. Show them up before the world. We haven't been using B-76's in low-level attacks. I want to bring two groups of them in on the deck. Buzz up the Amur at fifty feet altitude. It'll be dangerous, but they won't be expecting it. Their heavy guns can't track us that low. Directly above the bomber groups, I'm going to have a flight of camera ships. They'll film the whole operation. Then we'll have them. The films will show the 76's skimming low down the south side. The camera ships will be high enough to catch the real bomb pattern and the phoney one. Then we turn the films over to the U.N.—via an unhappy State Department."

"I don't like it, Jim."

The air force officer straightened. "And I don't like those Keg-VI rocket fighters they're making—north of the Amur. I figured up the score, Clem. It's been costing us more—in money, man-hours, and casualties—to shoot down a Keg-VI than it costs the

Reds to make one. And that's a helluva note. Here we've got a chance to strike at the factories without violating anybody's neutrality."

Horrey said nothing. Yaney clapped his thighs and stood up. "Think about it, Clem. I talked the big boss into calling a meeting after lunch. He'll probably notify you in a few minutes. I've got to do some more politicking. See you, chum." He started out, then paused. "Whatchoo say her name was?"

"Agnes," Horrey mumbled absently. "Have a good time."

Yaney stuck up his thumb and departed. Horrey slowly gathered his wits and turned to the sortie-reports. They were full of Keg-VI's and casualties. He shuddered and pushed them aside, then he answered a jangling telephone.

"Your wife, sir," said Sergeant Agnes. Her voice was frosty.

"What's the matter? Is Yaney bothering you?"

He heard her lick her lips nervously. "Uh-yes, he's still here—"

"Tell him to beat it."

Agnes was a brave girl. She told Yaney to beat it, General, sir. Horrey heard the officer chuckle and make a highly personal remark.

"Your wife, sir," the flustered girl repeated.

"Put her on."

Nora's voice was tremulous with excitement. "Clement, there are a dozen men parading up and down in front of our house. I'm afraid to go out."

"What? I don't understand."

"I don't either, Clement. They're carrying signs. In Japanese. And there are six little children; they have signs too. A crowd's collecting."

"Pickets! What in the name of—I!" He paused. "Has Yoshigura left yet?"

"Who? Oh, the servant you fired.

Yes, he was gone when I got up."

HORREY cursed inwardly. He knew what was up. Every time an American fired a Japanese, all the offended employee had to do was to take his beef to the local Communists, and the Reds arranged for pickets provided the man would team up with the party. But he had always imagined that Yoshi was a fervent nationalist.

"Don't worry about it, Nora. I'll send a couple of M.P.'s to keep them from bothering the house. We can't run them out of the street, though."

"Do hurry, Clement. I'm worried." She hung up.

"Agnes, get me the provost marshal," he bellowed.

"Yes, sir," she called.

Horrey drummed impatiently on the desk. It looked like a bad day. Pickets!—it was humiliating! Especially the children. Yoshigura didn't even have a wife, but the kids would be carrying signs that read, "**HORREY FIRED OUR FATHER**" and "**HORREY TOOK AWAY OUR BREAD**" and "**HORREY GROWS FAT WHILE WE STARVE**". It was sickening.

"Provost Marshal's Office, Colonel Robin," croaked the phone.

"Colonel?—General Horrey. Could you get me two guards for my front porch? I've got a picket line."

The phone hesitated. "Commie trouble, General? Certainly, sir. I'll supply the guards immediately. But the commanding general has issued a new ruling on this business. Have you seen it?"

"Probably been across my desk," Horrey grunted. "I don't remember it."

"Well, the gist of it is: we're to expose this racket wherever we can. Air it on the radio, in the papers. Did you fire somebody, sir?"

"Yeah. My houseboy tried to black-mail me. But listen, I don't want anything aired, Colonel."

"Blackmail, eh? Well I can see how publicity might be embarrassing in that case. Nevertheless, the commander's ruling insists that I take your statement and statements from witnesses. It's not up to me, sir. It'll go to his desk. He'll decide. We're trying to show these Red pickets up for phonies. Tell the people the truth. Why don't you speak to him, sir?"

Horrey paused. "I'm sorry now that I called you, Colonel."

"Well, there's nothing I can..."

"I know, I know. All right, I'll make a statement and leave it with my secretary. You can send someone out to get Nora's story."

"Thank you, sir. I'll get the guards right over."

Horrey called Agnes in. She was still blushing, and when she came through the door he caught a glimpse of a leather flight jacket in the ante-room.

"Yaney still out there."

Her blue eyes suffered toward the ceiling. "Ye-e-ss, sir."

"What does he want?"

"I—uh, well—" She swallowed hard.

"Mmph! I see. Well, get rid of him somehow."

"He won't go unless I give him a date."

"Then give him one," Horrey growled. "...if you want to," he added hastily.

"I'm not supposed to—go with—I mean—"

"Then type yourself a set of orders assigning yourself to his command for the rest of the day. I'll sign them."

"It'd be more fun to be chased by M.P., Clem," drawled Yaney from the doorway. "But then again—to my command—hmmm—"

Even the roots of Agnes' blonde hair turned red. She stuttered helplessly.

"Why don't you get out of here, Yaney," Horrey growled.

The air officer grinned. "Hear your wife's being picketed. I've never met your wife, have I?"

"Then why don't you go meet her. Go anywhere. But just get out of here."

"My, my!" purred Yaney. He backed away. "See you later, honey."

Agnes nodded imperceptibly. "If it's an order, sir." Her voice was acid, but her eyes were pleased.

WHEN YANEY was gone, the general dictated a statement leaving out any mention of the creeping things and using his wife's imaginative description of a burglar. "Yoshigura asked for a salary increase, and threatened to reveal to superior officers that I was firing at what he supposed to be an hallucination," he said. Horrey made it as brief as possible and padded it with no untruths. He was trusting in Nora to confirm it.

A few minutes later, a note came in from the commander ordering a staff meeting for one o'clock—"To discuss intelligence report 73-G." Horrey felt incapable of making a decision on the Amur River targets. He felt incapable of anything more than a stiff drink.

Again, Nora called. "When are the guards coming?" she wanted to know. "The crowd's getting bigger. I'm frightened, Clement."

"They should be there in a few minutes, honey. Don't worry."

"All right, but I wish you'd come."

"I'll check with the provost again," he promised, and hung up.

The provost marshal reported that a jeep was on its way. Horrey re-

turned to his sortie reports. He was beginning to wish that he had not fired the servant.

During the lunch hour, he called a driver and cruised in his staff car within a block of the house. There was a crowd all right, but not of alarming size. Pedestrians who wandered past bunched up in the street to stare at the pickets and exchange words with them. There was no disorder, and he caught a glimpse of two white helmets on his porch. Nevertheless, it made him hotly angry. He longed to drive through the rabble with blaring horn, stop at his doorstep, and walk inside with a contemptuous sniff at the Reds. But reason told him to drive on.

"Drive on, Corporal," he sighed. "Officer's Mess, I suppose."

Promptly at one, the staff convened. For purposes of salesmanship, Yaney had reattired himself in smart and proper uniform, discarding the leather jacket and the fifty-mission crush. Horrey had never seen the man in any pose but that of a slouching, tobacco-chewing combat officer, and the contrast was startling. His voice had gone polite, and he argued with a quiet eloquence and a scholarliness befitting a Pentagon official. Horrey noticed that the commanding general was impressed.

"Gentlemen," Yaney said quietly. "I will not try to impose upon you the notion that bombing the Amur is politically safe. It is not politically safe. But every decision—however small—has its reflections in the political mirror. We make them every day, down to the least gun-toting dogfaced Gee-Eye, we make them. Who was it that said, 'War is an extension of politics'?"

"Karl von Clausewitz," Horrey grunted automatically.

"Yes. As I said, if we rely upon

the State Department to make up our minds on every issue with a political aspect; then it would be militarily wise to move the State Department offices to a dugout just behind the battle-lines."

The room laughed. The commanding general spoke with quiet sharpness: "Let us have facts, Yaney. We are not here to criticize politicians."

YANEY PRESENTED his plan to avoid another nation's entry into the war. "We will strike for the southernmost parts of the dams. Even the civilians who witness it from the Siberian bank will be able to see that our aircraft did not cause the explosions on the north bank. Our bomb run will be low enough to clearly define our pattern from the phoney. To me, gentlemen, it seems foolproof. They simply don't anticipate any low-level attacks."

"You'll use delay fusing, I suppose," murmured an officer.

"As short a delay as is safe, sir. We'll want out cameras to catch both the formation and the explosion patterns in the same picture. I can't see how this project should require State Department approval—any more than we need their approval to shoot Russian 'observers' fighting with the ground troops." Yaney nodded that he was finished and sat down.

There was a short silence. The commanding general seemed immersed in deep thought. At last he spoke, slowly, distinctly. "We cannot, must not, exceed our authority, gentlemen. We are soldiers of a republic, gentlemen, subject to the nation's will. What we must decide is this: are we offering another nation an excuse it wants to attack us openly? If so, then we must submit the problem to the President. If not, we are free to strike. I want opinions from each of you, before I

state my own." He looked slowly around the room. His eyes paused on one man. "General Sorrell, how do you feel about it?"

Sorrell was a cautious officer. "I'm against it, Sir," he said, and stood up to expound.

But the commander waved him down. "Arguments later," he said. "I want a preliminary poll. "General Horrey, how about you?"

Horrey jumped. He felt his hands quivering. The Yoshigura incident bothered him; an embarrassing situation had grown out of nothing. Tomorrow growing out of today. And the warning—

"Well?"

"Uh, may I reserve my opinion for a moment, sir?" Horrey asked. "I'm still weighing it."

The commander nodded and moved on. "Quinnly?"

"I'm for it, sir."

"Moswell?"

"For it, sir."

"Stinwald?"

"Decidedly against, sir!"

"And now back to you, Horrey. Have you made up your mind yet?" The commander's eyes twinkled teasingly.

"What's the vote, general?"

"Two and two. You're the key."

"Key—" Horrey shuddered and sat bolt upright.

"Something wrong?"

They couldn't do this to him, he thought angrily. The damned little creeps telling him how to run his share of the war! The hell with them!

"I go along with General Yaney, sir," he growled.

THE COMMANDER chuckled. "Belated, but forceful enough. Well, gentlemen. I'm happy to say I agree with the majority. But the meeting's still open, if the minority wants

to change our minds."

Sorrell and Stinwald both shook their heads. The commander looked at the air officer. "Go to it then, Yaney. How soon?"

Yaney blushed. "All the crews in the 650th and 524th groups are on standby. The weather's perfect today, sir, and the wing commander is just waiting for my radiogram. I can get the mission under way without leaving this building."

The commanding general failed to crack the faintest smile. He nodded soberly and stood up. "Good day to you," he murmured, and the men came to their feet as he left the room.

It was finished. Yaney came across the room to thank him for his support, but Horrey only muttered as his hand was wrung. Tomorrow was a fast-growing little petunia indeed, he thought grimly. And the little creeps weren't going to like it very well.

Yaney accompanied him back to his office. "I think I'll go out and look at your pickets, Clem," he said with a grin. "I want a picture of that—to show your grandchildren. Show 'em how Grandpa persecuted the proletariat."

"I don't have any children. How can I—"

"Oh, nuts. I'll speak to your wife about that. Anyway, I'll be there when you get home. I'm taking Agnes off your hands for the afternoon. We're going out and drink your whiskey and eat your chow. And torment your spouse. Be prompt for dinner, old man."

Horrey purpled. Agnes was coming out of the office as they approached. She handed him the orders he had told her to type.

"Where do you think you're going, Sergeant?" he growled, eyeing her handbag.

She looked confused. "But, sir—

General Yaney said you said I was to go!"

"Well, Jim?"

Yaney grinned. "Say it, Clem, so I won't be a liar."

Horrey sputtered for a moment, then: "All right, beat it, but stay out of trouble. This is Tokyo, not...." He signed the transfer order.

"Ain't he chicken?" Yaney said to the sergeant. He took her arm and marched her away.

THE PHONE was ringing when he entered the office. Lacking a secretary, he answered it himself—although a file-clerk was rushing toward it with a handful of papers.

It was the commander himself. "About this picketing business, Horrey. It's just come onto my desk. Would it embarrass you if I released it to the press? It's not your statement so much that's important, but the police checked up on Yoshigura. He doesn't have a family at all, and it's the first opportunity we've had to expose this silly children's picketing for their "father".

Horrey paused. The Red propaganda campaign must be rather important, he thought, if the commander was handling such matters personally. He usually left such details to his press staff.

"No more embarrassing than the pickets themselves, I guess, sir."

The commander thanked him and hung up. Horrey glanced at his watch. In half an hour, he was supposed to stretch out in Dr. Sikewitz's office for a session of refined psychic torment. The thought of it made him angry. "Only imagining that I'm imagining, eh?" he muttered. "Well, I won't go." He strode to his desk to begin the afternoon's work.

He was buried in a pile of maps and arguing with his aides when his

wife called again. She said only one word: his name.

"What now, Nora?" he growled irritably.

The receiver rattled in his ear as she handed the phone to someone. But there was another level of sound that came to him faintly—shouting, and the rattle of broken glass. Then someone was panting into the phone.

"Howdy, Clem," said Yaney's voice. "Guess I started me a revolution."

"What? What are you talking about? What's that noise, Jim?" Horrey demanded.

"Keep your britches on, old man. Don't worry, I called the provost marshal. He's sending up reinforcements."

The general's bellow shook the office furniture. "What the hell have you done?"

"Easy, boy, easy! I'm trying to tell you. Aggie and I got here half an hour ago. Those bums in the street thought I was you. You should have heard what they called me. Maybe you'd understand it. I don't speak—"

"Are you trying to tell me that you—"

"E-e-easy boy! No I'm not trying to tell you that. I...conducted myself as an officer and a gentleman. I merely sneered and led Aggie inside."

Horrey heard the sound of two shots in the receiver. "What's that?"

"M.P.s had to shoot another Jap, I guess. Anyway, it was when I went back out with a camera that they got rough, Clem. Like I said—pictures for your grandchildren. They didn't want their pictures taken. They got real nasty. One of 'em threw a rock. I even took that. But when they jumped the fence and grabbed my camera, I didn't like it. They busted it on the sidewalk, Clem."

The general breathed ominously into the phone and waited.

"Had a hard time getting that cam-

era, Clem—an f-1.5 German job. Had to knife a *Schutzstaffel* major for it: that was the time I bailed out over Belgium—”

“Skip the baloney! What happened?”

“They busted my camera, Clem.”

“And so you threw a fist at one of them.”

“One! Don’t tease me, Clem boy. I laid out four of them before somebody clipped me with a piece of pipe. Boy, I’ve got a head! The M.P.s started out to break it up, and the pickets broke for the street. They tried to break through the crowd. Some of the crowd tried to grab them; and some others wanted to help them get away. So, we got a riot. Big free-for-all. Everybody’s outraged at somebody. Once in awhile some crank jumps the fence and bolts for the house, yelling ‘Banzai’. Still think I’m you, I guess. M.P.s sit on the steps waiting for help. They just shoot the ones that charge—in the legs. Three Japs kicking on the lawn now. Heh! It’s a good fight, Clem.”

HORREY scorched his ears with thirty seconds of abuse. “If anything happens to Nora, I’ll—”

“Yeh yeh, sure! She’s all right, Clem. I’ll take care of her. I always pack a Birretta—little seven-millimeter automatic I lifted off an Italian—”

Horrey hung up. He put on his coat and hat and started out of the office. Again the phone rang. He answered it in the anteroom.

“Colonel Robin, sir,” grunted the provost marshal. “There’s an unfortunate development—”

“Yeah, I’ve heard about it.”

“Tell me, sir—if you’ll pardon the inference—is General Yaney, well, is he mentally—”

“He’s a killer, Colonel,” Horrey

growled, wondering why he should defend the man. “He’s a combat officer and an ex-fighter pilot. He lives for brawls, and gets paid for it. That’s all.”

Robin glumpled disapprovingly. “Well—I’d advise you to stay in your office until we get this cleared up, sir. There’s something in the wind. All day long there’ve been Red meetings in the city. Yours isn’t the only case. I don’t know what’s afoot, but their rabble-rousers say the allies are about to pull a sneak attack on Russia. Sounds like fifties doesn’t it—before the half-war?”

“Where did you hear about this?” Horrey asked coldly. “Does the commanding general know what they’re saying?”

“I’ve sent him a report—”

“Call him immediately, Colonel. This may be more important than you think.”

“Sir? Why—we’re not going to bomb Russia, are we?”

“Colonel, I couldn’t possibly answer that. But call the commander immediately!”

“Yes sir. Let me suggest again, sir, stay away from your house until the trouble’s over.”

“Yeah.” General Horrey dropped the phone in its cradle, readjusted his hat, and paused in the doorway.

“If anyone wants me,” he said to a filing clerk, “I’ll be at home.”

There was a radio in Horrey’s staff car. It was tuned to the G.I. station as he climbed into the back seat and ordered the driver to take him home. The announcer was giving a mocking account of the child-pickets in front of his house, and furnishing a description of the riot: “And we see how the Communists have managed to build the firing of a small-time blackmailer into a bloody and brutal demonstration,” said the radio. Then it mocked

Red claims of an impending attack on Russia.

"Turn it off, Corporal," the general ordered. He was deeply disturbed. How had the Commies known about the Amur raids?—or were they only guessing? It had not been decided until the staff meeting, and yet Robin said that the demonstrators had been at it all day. Was it possible that they had seen the intelligence report and had guessed what the staff's decision would be? Was there a leak somewhere in the intelligence service itself?

HORREY felt somehow that he had walked into a trap. If the Reds knew that the General Staff was aware of the mined river, then they might take counter-measures of some sort. The intelligence report made no mention of the mines, however. Yaney had brought the story orally. If there was a leak, it was bound to be in high places.

A grim and suspicious idea struck him, but he dismissed it immediately.

They were approaching an intersection near Horrey's home, and the driver slowed to a crawl. Two jeeps full of M.P.s flashed past the corner, and Horrey saw a pedestrian slip around the edge of a building and turn his back while the jeeps went by. The man's hat was pulled low over his eyes. When the police were gone, the man stepped around the corner again. Horrey could see the edge of his sleeve as he stood watching the melee in the next block. There was something familiar about the man.

"Shall I go on, sir?" asked the driver. "It sounds kind of rugged."

There were sounds of shouting, but only an occasional shot. He could not see the riot for the buildings, but a few running pedestrians burst past the corner.

"Pull up to the curb," he murmured. "I'm going to get out for a

minute."

The driver looked startled; his eyes protested the impetuosity of it, but he said nothing.

"You have an opinion, Corporal?" Horrey grunted.

"Yes, sir. My .45 is in the glove compartment. Would you care to borrow it?"

Horrey smiled faintly as he climbed out on the sidewalk. "I didn't get my rank for marksmanship, son. Fact is—I couldn't hit a bull in the butt with a paddle." He started away.

"May I come then, sir?"

"If you like." Horrey strode quietly toward the bit of coat-sleeve that protruded around the edge of the building. The man was watching the fight, and his head was turned away as the general drew up beside him. The man was grinning contentedly at the scattered scene of violence. A few were lying in the streets. The fist fights were breaking up, and the combat area was spreading out as the police wielded their clubs. Bruised and bloody battlers were stealing away from the trouble-spot.

General Horrey stared grimly at the back of Yoshigura's neck. "Enjoying the fight, eh?" he growled in a low voice.

"Ah, yesss. Justice is..." The servant's voice trailed off. He looked around slowly, and his sallow face contorted with shock.

Horrey's red countenance darkened with slow anger. He was not agile, but the Japanese was too surprised to duck the meaty fist that the general threw. The jarring *thuk* of the blow was most satisfying. Yoshigura fell clumsily and rolled into the gutter. He got to his hands and knees, and blood was draining from his mouth and nose. Horrey congratulated himself for still being able to deliver a good punch at the age of fifty.

"Get up!" he grunted. "I have an

idea the cops would like to see you about a matter of espionage." It was only a guess. Living in Horrey's household, the servant might gain access to a lot of small-talk and idle remarks that would give the Reds an insight into staff matters. By careful piecing together of this-and-that, they might even have been able to deduce the staff's decision on the Amur matter before the decision was made.

YOSHIGURA climbed slowly to his feet, breathing hate. Suddenly he turned and screamed something in Japanese toward the rioters. Horrey waded into him with a curse. His heavy fists crashed into the servant's body like unimaginative battering rams. Yoshigura went down gasping, and came back up with a knife. He slipped forward, catlike. Three rioters were running toward them, shouting angrily.

Horrey grabbed at the knife-arm as the blade slashed at his tunic. The point dug into the flesh of his side. A gunshot exploded at his elbow, and Yoshigura went down screaming. He clutched a shattered ankle as his foot flopped loosely and turned aside.

"Thanks, son," he grunted to the driver. "Watch those three coming there."

"They're stopping, sir. They see we're armed. Are you hurt badly?"

He examined his slashed tunic, and unbuttoned it to peel back a bloody shirt. There was a ragged, painful gash, but it wasn't deep. "Nothing much," he grunted. "Load this joker in the staff car, Corporal. Take him down to Colonel Robin. I'll call the colonel from the house."

"Uh—sir—"

"What?"

"Do you mean to walk through that brawl, sir?" The driver looked worried.

"Yeah, you can't drive through it. Now hurry."

The driver shrugged and offered his gun. Horrey hesitated, then took it. He started toward his house while the corporal dragged the howling Yoshigura toward the car. The three rioters who had answered the servant's call for help stood fifty feet away, apparently not watching him.

Whistles were still beating occasionally, but most of the crowd had dispersed, and only a dozen rioters lingered to battle the M. P.s. They were not attacking, but only trying to escape encirclement and resist arrest. The area was lightly sprinkled with the bodies of the wounded or dead.

The three men were too immobile to suit the general's ease. He shied away from them and, gun in hand, he started across the street. Suspicion made him look back. One of the men was lowering a pistol on him. Horrey halted. The bullet fanned past his chest. The man crouched and prepared to fire again. The other two darted aside. Fury made a great calmness within him. He stood sideways and lifted his weapon like a duelist. The Japanese tossed two nervous shots at him. Horrey felt their wind, and felt scorn for a man who was even a worse marksman than himself. He took slow aim, then emptied the gun at his assailant. The man dropped and the pistol skidded in the street. Another man dived for it. Horrey moved quickly away.

A SMALL crack came from the direction of the house, and the second man somersaulted and lay still. The third fled. Horrey marched homeward. Yaney was leaning on the gatepost, blowing smoke off the muzzle of a tiny automatic. He grinned.

"Scuse me for horning in on your fun, Clem."

Horrey thanked him grudgingly.

The trouble with Yaney, he thought, was that the man really did regard it as fun. Violence was his meat.

"Where's Nora?" he asked as they trotted up the steps of the American-style house that had once belonged to a small-time Jap industrialist.

"Heh! In bed. Said she was sleepy. Funny time to get sleepy."

Horrey sighed. It was Nora's way of handling any situation with which she couldn't cope. She went to bed, curled up in a knot beneath the covers, and slept until the situation went away. Sometimes she made peculiar noises in her throat and with her lips—smacking sounds that reminded the general of a nursing infant. During such periods, she seemed to lose touch with reality, and behaved with a childlike naïvete.

And sometimes, the general thought, it would be nice to crawl in and curl up beside her. But he never thought about it at length.

Sergeant Agnes arose nervously as they entered the parlor. She was trying to compromise between Yaney's informality and the presence of her boss. The pretty blonde was obviously uncomfortable in her immediate surroundings. Yaney caught it and laughed.

"Does he make you snap to, baby?"

Agnes eyed her boss miserably and turned bright scarlet. She could neither tell one general to go to hell nor be strictly formal with the other. Horrey pitied her. She was probably the best soldier of the three, he thought. He wanted to tell them both to beat it, but then he would be alone, waiting for darkness and the little creeps.

"Sit down, Agnes," he murmured, with some embarrassment. "This is my home. If you act like we were in the office, I'll shoo you both away."

Agnes sat down, and Yaney cackled. "Come on, baby," he said. "We can

take a hint."

"No, no!" Horrey said hurriedly. "I want you to stay, really." Casually, he tossed his tunic across a chair and removed the insignia from his shirt collar.

"Ah, a civilian now," Yaney chorled.

HE FLUSHED. He and Yaney wore the same stars, but Yaney's meant something entirely different from his own. Yaney's stars were really scars; he liked to display them only as symbols of a fight he had won by hacking his way up from a low place to a high place. To Horrey, his rank meant that he had a higher obligation in man's quest for a better world, an obligation to authority. Sometimes, he wondered how any change would be wrought in the world when men like Yaney really wanted to fight. He went to care for the wound, and returned quickly.

"When are you going back to the mainland, Jim?" he asked quietly.

"That depends, Clem." He sat on the arm of Agnes' chair and grinned. "I meant to lead the Amur raid at first. And then I got to thinking. When Russia strikes back at us, the staff will want me here for a powwow."

Horrey stiffened. "What do you mean—'when they strike back'?"

Yaney looked impatiently amused. "Really, Clem—you don't believe all that guff about this raid being safe?"

Horrey stalked forward to loom over him. "What do you know that you didn't tell us?" he demanded.

Yaney frowned. "Nothing. Nothing at all. I told you the whole story, Clem. Isn't that enough to convince you?"

"No, it's not. I thought the camera ships assured—"

Yaney scoffed. "Stop and think! How long will it take to get the ca-

mera-ships back from the raid, develop the pictures, televise them to Washington, and finally get them to the U. N. and to the world? And then think how long it will take for Moscow to get a flight of bombers in the air after they get a wire from Siberia."

The general sputtered. "Now wait, Jim—your planes will call back a strike report from the target area. It'll be relayed immediately through here to Washington. Within an hour the story'll be in the newscasts."

"Without pictorial proof, Clem! Migawd, man! Do you think for an instant that an undocumented radio-story will stop the Kremlin from declaring war immediately? Why do you think they planted the mines? They wanted an excuse. Will they wait for us to shatter their excuse? Hellllll!" He gave Horrey a you-can-do-better-than-that smile.

HORREY SAT down heavily in shocked silence. Yaney laughed at his white face. Agnes was looking from one to the other in mystified silence.

"Lordy, Clem, wake up! Didn't you know what you were voting for? Everybody else knew, I'm sure. Naturally nobody could come right out and say that the staff itself was deciding on a declaration of war."

Horrey choked. "I—I was warned against you," he hissed.

The air officer chuckled. "By Sorrell, I'll bet. Don't take it so hard, Clem! War's inevitable anyway. And now we've got a way of knowing when it'll happen—an advantage we wouldn't have otherwise."

"We won't have it. Who knows, besides us?"

"The air force commander in Europe knows, Clem."

"How?"

"He was my group commander in

'43. We're old buddies."

"And you flew over for a Global Strategy meeting two weeks ago!"

"Right. He's on the alert. We talked. As soon as the Kremlin howls war, he'll get thirty groups on the way. And Clem, my own entire command is on the alert—every plane in shape, every crew on standby. I've pulled our punches on the Asian front lately, to conserve striking power. We're ready to deliver—and it won't be T.N.T. We can make our own decisions on atomic weapons now, you know."

"How many—?" Horrey gasped.

"Eighty-six U-bombs and a dozen H's. Plus smaller stuff. Every city of any size gets a dose of Uranium. Big ones get hydrogen. It's blunt, honest, simple."

"Washington will have your skin, Yaney!"

"Maybe. If it does, it'll have yours too, and the C.G.'s. We're talking about the Amur, remember. That was your decision. This other stuff is just hypothetical strategy. And what will Washington do when it's over? Will they point the finger at us and howl—'It's their fault, World, not ours!' Now, wouldn't that be silly!"

"I'm going to fight you, Yaney!"

The air commander stiffened haughtily, for a moment. But he relaxed, smiled, and glanced at his watch. "In half an hour, the first squadrons will be over the target. I wish I were with them." Then he grinned at Agnes and added, "If it weren't for present company."

The WAC seemed not to hear him. "I've got a brother in Europe," she said tonelessly.

Yaney shot her an uneasy glance. Then he brightened. "Can you cook, kid? Why don't we get some chow? All this war talk gives me an appetite."

She nodded expressionlessly and left for the kitchen. Yaney started to fol-

low. Horrey called him back quietly.

"Jim, we've been friends for a long time. Tell me—doesn't this bother your conscience?"

Yaney stared at him thoughtfully, then shook his head. "You believe in peace, don't you, old man?"

"I do."

"Yeah, that's what they all say, Clem. It's popular to believe. Unfortunately, the believers can't feel it. Now you tell me, Clem—what's the difference between a man and a turnip?"

Horrey's face remained impassive. He said nothing. Yaney answered himself.

"A turnip got to be a turnip by sitting still and not bothering anybody. It dealt with its enemies by learning to be unobtrusive and modest. That's why a turnip can't fly an airplane or dance a jig." Yaney winked and strolled off toward the kitchen.

HORREY STOOD looking after a man who believed fervently in the institution of war, and Horrey decided he had no comment. He went to call Robin about Yoshigura. Robin had the servant under questioning.

"It may be possible that other house-servants have been passing snatches of information to the Reds, General," Robin told him. "We're checking. But we're in a bad situation at the moment. We gave the Commies three dead martyrs in front of your house. They're not wasting any time exploiting it. They're organizing demonstrations all over the city. Somebody heaved a grenade through the newspaper window—for mocking the child pickets. Fortunately, they didn't have sense enough to pull the pin."

"Unfortunately, you mean!" Horrey grunted.

"Mmm? Why, sir?"

"Because that means it wasn't tossed by a Red. A party member

wouldn't be so stupid, Robin. It means they've got allies outside the party—misguided nationalists, maybe."

"Maybe you're right!" Robin admitted.

"Thank God it's your worry, not mine."

"It may be yours too, sir. I can't leave you more than one guard tonight."

"Don't leave me any!" Horrey snapped, and ended the conversation.

He wandered into the bedroom. Nora was bundled in the bedclothing. She was asleep, but her white, thin face was pinched into a tight frown, and her throat worked slowly as if she were swallowing. Her jaw made a slow chewing motion. Once, while he stared, she shivered from head to toe and made a queer clucking noise with her tongue. Funny, he thought, how a forty-year-old woman could suddenly become an infant.

Or try to be a turnip. But Yaney's homily irritated him. "Haven't I always cried for peace?" he asked himself. "Haven't I favored it in speeches before luncheon clubs, and spoken for it at press club meetings?"

Even the little creeps seemed to want peace.

Then he glanced down at his khaki-covered chest, with its slight paunch, and his pink trousers beneath the waistline. "Then why the hell am I wearing these?" he wondered.

He paused for a moment in the bedroom, then glanced at the ceiling. He grunted in surprise. The sergeant had actually come and installed the germicidal fixture, despite the riot. Evidently he had finished early. Horrey nodded approvingly and went to join the others.

At seven o'clock, the phone rang. It was for Yaney. The command pilot took the phone, listened for a moment,

noded once, and replaced it on the hook with a click of finality. He turned, looking seriously pleased. "It's done, Clem. Strike report's in. Good results."

"The mines, man! What happened?"

Yaney smiled. "As anticipated. Better keep your radio on."

Horrey accepted the situation with quiet resignation. He watched the younger man curiously for a moment, then: "We'd better not leave. I suppose the commander will want us."

Yaney nodded. "As soon as the Kremlin speaks, probably." He glanced at Agnes. "Sorry we can't go out, kid."

Agnes, however, looked relieved. They went to sit in the parlor and wait, smoking nervously, and exchanging quiet talk.

AT EIGHT-THIRTY it came. First the telephone rang. Before Horrey reached it, the radio music faded, and an announcer said: "We interrupt this program to bring you a special bulletin. American diplomats in Moscow are being handed—"

"You did it, Yaney," Horrey said quietly. "I'm glad I didn't."

The air officer's eyes were sad, but without admission of guilt. "It's for the best, Clem. I'm not sorry."

"...claration of war, according to Moscow Radio," said the announcer.

Horrey went to answer the phone. While he was speaking, the city's sirens began sounding the black-out warning. When he returned to the parlor, they waited expectantly.

"Let's go to headquarters," he said.

Horrey left word with the M.P. on the porch that he was to be called in the event of trouble, and that Nora was to be informed of his whereabouts when she awakened.

"Why can't I stay with her, sir?" Agnes asked.

Horrey paused, then nodded. "I—

I'd appreciate it, Sergeant." He corrected himself to say, "Agnes", and then he moved away in embarrassment.

Yaney chuckled. "'Tain't fighting that makes the world a raw place," he said. "It's the stiff-minded jokers like you, Jim."

The staff meeting was a protracted affair. Horrey expected, and almost hoped, that Yaney would catch it in the neck. But as the officers crowded around the brightly lighted map table and discussed their plans, Yaney was treated with a stiff politeness. Occasionally they gave him a suspicious glance, but somehow their eyes always fell quietly back to the board. It was as though each man longed to pin the guilt on the air officer, yet realized that the guilt was shared. Only the minority of two prodded him with veiled hints.

Horrey wanted to speak. He wanted to say, "Yaney stood here and told us one thing while he really believed something else." But he never said it. Yaney would have replied, "You asked for facts, not opinions. You formed your own opinions from the facts of the Amur."

And Yaney was right. He could have suppressed the information about the mines, and gone ahead with the bombing, not even consulting the staff, pretending ignorance. Instead, he had come to his superiors like a soldier. The trouble with Yaney: he would recognize no political authority above the military.

Twice Horrey noticed the commanding general peering at Yaney's blandly innocent face while someone else was speaking, and twice he thought he detected a glimmer of sardonic amusement in the commander's eyes. Was it as Yaney claimed then—that each man among them, except Horrey, had realized that he had been voting for

war or peace? Horrey scorned himself for not thinking the matter out more clearly. He had been on edge, but there was no excuse.

Once a distant explosion quivered the room, and the commander stepped hastily to the phone. "An explosion at the pumping station, gentlemen," he said upon returning. "Clearly sabotage."

The wave of local troubles had begun.

THE GROUP broke up after midnight. Yaney's plan for an immediate, across-the-board air-strike had been approved after only brief meditation. Plans that had been prepared for months were removed from their safes, studied, and amended. A few immediate instructions were sent to field commanders. Yaney sent a two-word message to his command—"Happy Epoch, Gentlemen"—and they would understand.

Horrey went home to his wife at one. He wore his .45 and he cut the flap from the holster. The streets were dark. The streets were full of hate. There was fear in the streets. Henceforth the blackout would be permanently in force.

There was no trouble at his house. Now the world had larger worries than a general who fired his servant. He tiptoed through the darkened parlor, for Agnes was sleeping on the sofa. The bedroom light was on. He paused in the doorway. Nora had arisen, but she was asleep again—stretched out across the bed in a negligee. Tomorrow he would try to arrange passage for her—back to the States. Tokyo was no place for Nora with a full-scale war under way. Or did it matter? The States wouldn't be much safer. Still, he would send her back.

A light flicked on in the parlor, and he went back to see the WAC rub-

bing sleep from her eyes. She sat on the sofa with her bare feet curled beneath her. For the first time, Horrey noticed that he had a very beautiful secretary. He was glad she smiled at him, even though the smile was formal. He was glad she didn't come to an uneasy attention when he entered.

"I'm sorry Yaney was such a pest," he said softly, and took a chair across the room.

She pressed her hands against her folded shins and stared down at them. The light from the lamp caught in her hair, darkening the shadows on her face. "He wasn't exactly a pest, sir," she said slowly. "It's just—that I don't understand him, I guess. He frightens me."

The general nodded. Men like Yaney always frightened their women, he thought. But their women loved them for it. He could see that the dynamic air officer had done something to this girl's mind and heart; and she was baffled by it. Yaney was a rare bird—a fighter to the core—and the world was suspicious of its rare birds. Once fighters had been common, before men tried to be turnips.

Again he was displeased with Yaney's homily.

"Well, Agnes, I guess you'll have a new boss before too long."

She looked up, frowning. "I don't understand, sir."

"I'm going to the mainland, if I can swing it. And I think I can."

"You want to go?"

He nodded, looking aside. "I bungled things up. I cast my advice for Yaney's plan. I was too stupid to even see this afternoon's consequences."

AGNES CLEARED her throat and looked uneasy. A general scolding himself before a sergeant was a new phenomenon. Still, she had the

courage to say, "I'm sure you did what you thought was best, sir."

"No, but I—" He stopped. A feeling of uneasiness came over him. "Do you suppose people have convictions of which they aren't even aware? Underlying beliefs that contradict the ones they think they believe?"

"You mean like instincts, sir?"

He scarcely heard her. "Maybe—I—did do what I thought was best." Suddenly he shot her a quizzical glance. "Agnes—"

"Yes sir?"

"How would you like to be a turnip?"

She giggled, then frowned peculiarly without erasing the grin. "What a horrible idea!" She cocked her head.

Something in Horrey seemed to come alive. "Tell me, when you were a child, did you ever wish you were something else? A dog maybe, a fish, a butterfly?"

She grinned and blushed. "Sure. I used to wish I was a cat—with long claws, to scratch my big brother."

The general chuckled happily. "But never a turnip?"

"Never a turnip."

"I used to wish I was a chicken-hawk," he confided. "Used to watch them swoop down in the fields, and watch the old hens hide in the brush and cluck."

They shared a moment of solemn silence.

"Yaney's the chicken-hawk, though," he murmured. Then he stood up. "Better get some sleep, child. I'll take you to the spare bedroom. It's not safe to go out. . . ." He paused.

A siren had begun to wail in the distance. Another sprang up to accompany it. While they listened, the city became alive with sound. Small whistles, deep-throated pipes, spinning discs that shrieked—all wailing, all warning—"Let us be afraid together."

The M.P. on the porch needlessly called through the front door. "Air warning, sir!"

"On second thought," said Horrey, "I'll show you the way to the basement. There's a shelter down there. I'll have to wake Nora, I guess." Then he heard her coming down the hall, and in a moment she stood in the doorway, staring about in fright. Her hands were over her ears, screening out the screech of the city.

"What is it, Clement?" She was trembling from head to toe.

Somehow, her terrified appearance saddened him. A child that wanted security. "Oh, probably a Manchurian plane or two," he told her casually, knowing it was a lie. "Nothing to worry about. Might be only a practice warning. If you don't like it, maybe you'd better go down to the basement."

"You come too!" she cried as she hurried away.

He whispered to Agnes, "Go with her. I'll hang around awhile to let her think there's nothing to worry about."

AGNES NODDED and moved away. The quickness of her step spoke of excitement. Strange! She had never felt the teeth of danger, but now there was cause for fear, and she surely saw it. Was not inexperience the catalyst of fear? But the cloak of anticipation had fallen about her, the masking-mantle of a quiet eagerness. Was Yaney right? Beneath the embroidered costume of polite culture, did the heart scorn peace?

He doused the parlor light, and became aware of the bed-lamp's gleam on the floor of the hallway. A river of yellow light, calling him. They were no doubt waiting. He turned toward the basement, then paused a moment, thinking.

He had fired Yoshigura, and men

had died. Because they died, others were angry. And the anger would sweep the scythe of further death. Anger was resonant, oscillating in the tuned circuit of the social heart long after the initiating pulse had faded. By now they had forgotten Yoshigura, but the echoes of anger would grow.

He had listened to Yaney, called for bombing of the Amur. And war came. And millions would die. What did it matter? Man, only a microcosm.

Or a necrocosm?

He sighed and turned away from the basement. He, Horrey, did have a responsibility for tomorrow, one that belonged to him alone. The responsibility was not the fighter's, not Yaney's, for Yaney could never feel it. He moved toward the bedroom light. The room was warm—warm with the smell of a slow-minded woman whom he loved. Her powder, her creams, her perspiration on the pillow—odors—and the odor of fright.

He stepped toward the lamp, but the voice stopped him: "You have finally come."

They had infiltrated the radio in darkness while Nora had been asleep earlier in the evening. He stared at it calmly.

"You did not obey."

He folded his arms and stood glowing. "I obeyed the weight of my thoughts," he growled. "How can tomorrow rule its past?"

They were silent awhile, and he wondered if they were prepared to take revenge. The sound of heavy artillery was booming from the outskirts of the city. A familiar sound—almost comforting. Occasionally the speaker croaked static, as if clearing its throat.

Again it spoke, now wearily: "You helped make your tomorrow. Now live in it. We go."

"Who are you?"

"We revealed our name. It is

enough. You could not understand."

The static faded.

"Wait!" he snapped. "Where are you going?"

"Further back," said the tired voice. "We will try further back, to change the scheme."

"To change yesterday?"

"Yes."

"You have no right!"

A pause, while artillery spoke its gloomy poem in the distance.

"You like your world, Man?"

HE STRAIGHTENED proudly. "Men have built it. They dragged their fingers in the earth and lifted up towers of steel, instruments of fury."

It was his world, he thought, and he loved it—if for no other reason than that Man had made it. Man was a king, a small king to be sure, but Horrey believed in Man's right to rule as he saw fit—be it for good or evil. And the creature from tomorrow wanted to change the yesterdays of ten thousand years, to erase the history that had fashioned today. How could he stop them?

The new ceiling fixture? It was there. And the being's name—the words of the electrician...

"Your name—that number—what does it mean?" he asked.

The voice was hesitant. "Our matter is your energy. Our energy is your matter. Our universes are related by tensor transformation equations. A wavelength in your system corresponds to a spatial relationship in ours. Our name is our position in our space."

Horrey shook his head in mystification. "I can't understand. I thought you were out of tomorrow."

Another pause. "Our world grows out of yours, lies parallel with your tomorrow. We are a part of your five-space tomorrow."

Again Horrey shook his head.

"You are destroying us." There was a note of anger in the voice now. "Your releases of energy correspond to the appearance of mass in our world-space. We must change your yesterday. Perhaps we shall have to destroy you."

He said nothing.

"Will you remove the light?" they asked. "Or must we force it off again?"

Without hesitation he tugged the chain and plunged the room in blackness.

"If you return the light, we shall afflict you."

The radio clicked off. The little creeps began goose-stepping up the wall again. He watched silently as they came, wave upon wave, like grimy cursing G.I.s flooding over the neutral, pock-marked ground toward the enemy. Running low, crouching over their rifles, bayonets gleaming dully in the dawn. He could not escape the conviction that they were somehow related to human life. They were not little worms, inching their way toward the moulding; of that he was certain. Their appearance in his world could have only a vague mathematical relationship to their appearance in their own world.

But what lay behind the strange and glowing phenomenon.

He let them get clear of the set. Their phosphorescence made concentric patterns on the wall. The pattern moved as a unit, pulsating with each jerky lurch ahead. He waited until their journey was half completed.

Then he took the calculated risk and pulled the light-cord.

FAINT VIOLET suffused the ceiling.

The beings stopped. They flattened against the wall as if ironed down by an unseen hand. They glowed more brightly, seemed to swell a little.

"Now change yesterday!" he snarled, backing away.

The glow slowly became a glare, and the room was flooded with the weird light. They were growing larger, flooding together as they absorbed the fleeting quanta.

Our matter is your energy, he remembered. He was bombarding them with their own substance! He backed against the door and suppressed the desire to run. "It's my show," he told himself grimly, "and I'll see it through."

They were no longer differentiated as to units, but had become a single patch of writhing radiation that seemed detached from the wall. It was trying to approach him! And he felt an aura of rage about it. He realized suddenly that he was holding his gun in a trembling fist, while his teeth ground together in expectancy of battle.

Suddenly the process reached saturation.

A high-pitched hum struck him like a blast of supersonic noise from the dive of a high-mach jet-craft. It drove him to his knees, and the gun clattered to the floor. His vision dimmed for a moment.

The humming waned. When he looked again, the breath caught in his throat. The tortured patch of light was gone. In its place was a gaping maw of blackness in which two worlds were fused. Beyond it lay—the world of the little creeps. He was staring into a laboratory. And the beings were watching him, the quietly frantic faces.

"Thought is a form of energy!" he gasped in sudden understanding.

THEY SAID nothing, but the leprous faces watched him in terrible accusation. In the center of the lab was a fat metal box from which a coaxial cable ran ceilingward. It too

seemed to be watching, from a pair of thick lenses in its face. Behind the lenses, lights were glowing, and Horrey associated it with a projector. Suddenly it spoke.

"My energy is being duplicated from beyond the transform-region. HELP ME. My energy is being duplicated from..."

It was a complaint, and the leprous faces turned to stare at it dully for a moment.

"Be silent!" said a voice.

The machine continued its complaint. A man stepped forward and jabbed at a button. The button was labelled "PAIN". The machine shrieked its high-pitched whine, then fell to crying softly.

"Now be silent," growled the voice again.

Horrey fumbled for the doorknob as he staggered to his feet.

"Do not attempt to escape," growled the voice. "We can kill you."

Horrey turned. His face was white and he was panting softly as he searched the group with his eyes, looking for the speaker.

The speaker was an old man, ragged and scrawny as were the others. Horrey stared at his face for a long time, then: "I know you," he said quietly.

The old man said nothing, but there was hate in his eyes, and shame.

The machine, no longer crying, spoke again: "*He cannot help what he is. He is a creature of thought energy from your place in the time plane.*"

"Be silent!" shrieked the old man in fury. "It is not so!"

Horrey's fascination was overpowering his fear.

"You are tomorrow's Yaney," he breathed, staring at the face grown seamy with wrinkles, wizened with self-loathing, twisted with fear.

"No! I am not!" the old one protested wildly.

"You are tomorrow's Yaney. But why have you come back to plague me? Why not plague yourself—the you of your younger days?"

"I am related to Yaney only by tensor transformation!" screamed the old man.

"I'll tell you why you wouldn't haunt yourself!" Horrey bellowed. "Old man Yaney knows young man Yaney won't listen! Not even if he knows the truth!—the truth about the tomorrow he's helping to make."

The old one clapped his hands to his face. "Kill him!" he groaned. "Kill him quickly."

"If I kill him," said the machine, "*his counterpart in our world shall also die.*"

"Kill him!"

"No!"

The old man howled a curse and flung himself at the machine, groping again for the pain-button. Sensing danger, Horrey ducked low and scooped up the gun. He took quick aim, with a steadiness born of desperation.

The gun barked. The old man stiffened, staggered back, clutching at a red blotch on his torn jacket.

THERE WAS a scream, but not from the old man. *It came from Horrey's basement!*

Then the gaunt old man was a crumpled heap on the floor.

"It is hopeless," said the machine, "*attempting to change yesterday.*"

The others were staring dumbly at the fallen old one. Horrey aimed at a lense of the machine.

Then, before he fired, it came—a violet light, flooding through the windows of the bedroom. It grew, and grew, until it surpassed the sun in its brilliance.

"Hell Bomb!"

Horrey threw himself to the floor

and covered his eyes against the blaze of light. There was no sound. Even the bark of ack-ack had stopped as the gunners sought refuge. Horrey's skin felt as if the dry blue flame of a blowtorch were hovering an inch away. The light penetrated the flesh of his hands and the membrane of his lids to fashion a dull red glow. Somewhere someone was screaming.

He counted thirty seconds, and opened his eyes. The maw of blackness between the world-spaces was still there, but beyond it lay only dust—thick dust, coagulating out of nothingness, growing thicker. From whence did it come?

Your energy is our mass... the Hell Bomb.

Then the power failed, and the ceiling light fluttered out. With it went the two-world space, vanished with only a pulse of high sound.

Horrey lay waiting for the shock-wave that would follow the explosion. It came as a roar that seemed to vibrate him up from the floor. Powdered glass sprayed over him from the window, and somewhere there was a sound of splintering wood. A section of the roof was buckling.

Then it was over, and he picked himself up wearily, bleeding from a hundred tiny cuts. Outside of the house, a voice was shouting that the bomb had destroyed the far end of the city.

The general picked a sliver of glass out of his face and staggered toward the basement stairway. Nora would be out like a turnip.

But there were already footsteps

on the stairs. It was the WAC.

"Nora—is she—?"

"All right, but scared," the girl panted. "It's—Yaney—something wrong."

"Not dead—?"

She shook her head. Horrey slowly descended the dark stairway. They had lighted a candle. By its light he saw Nora sitting on the floor with her face huddled in her hands.

And then he saw Yaney. The fighter was standing like a statue in the center of the stone floor, his eyes glazed with a schizophrenic dullness, his face was empty as the orb of the moon. Horrey approached him slowly.

"Yaney—snap out of it!"

The man's lips moved. A sound followed—like the wail of an infant.

Horrey stared at him quietly for a long time. Then he turned away. The man would have to be committed to an asylum. His mind was gone.

There would be a lot like him, the general thought. As the bombs exploded, and the creatures of the psychocosm—the world of the creeps—began to die, there would be a lot of broken minds. It was sad, in a sense.

But it gave him faith. For as the minds began to die, the war would have to end. The psychocosm—where the lab had been—perhaps in a sense it was the conscience of the world.

Outside, there was a war to fight—a just war.

"Take care of Nora," he said to the WAC. "I've got to go help at headquarters."

THE END

News Flash: DON WILCOX IS BACK!

One of the truly great writers of science fiction makes a triumphant return to these pages!

THE IRON MEN OF VENUS

In the February issue! Watch for it!

ENTROPIC MYSTERY

By DALE LORD

YOU DON'T get very far in the study of heat, energy, and thermodynamics without encountering the mysterious concept of entropy—at least it sounds mysterious when presented in mathematical terms as it usually is. We know a lot about heat, temperature and thermodynamics intuitively; we sense what is meant by these things as the result of common experience. You don't have to explain the meaning of "heat" to a man who's just backed into a hot stove!

But entropy is another matter. You can best visualize it somewhat like this. If you have a vessel divided into two sections, one-half of which is filled with gas and the other half a vacuum, and you break the wall between them, the gas will flow into the vacuum. But if you start the other way with the gas equally divided between the sections, by no means in your power (without outside aid) can you bring the case to come to the former or original state. That's obvious—but it demonstrates elusive entropy. Without spending outside energy—and more of it—you can't cause heat to flow "upwards."

That's the essence of entropy. It's a way of describing the fact that energy is forever deteriorating, flowing to lower and

lower levels. Since heat is just molecular motion, why is it that a hot thing doesn't get hotter as you just wait for it to do so? That's, entropy! If you were holding a metal rod and it suddenly became hotter and hotter without your putting energy into it—that'd be a violation of the second law of thermodynamics—that is, entropy would be decreasing. Entropy is therefore a measure of the randomness of things. As a clock runs down, for example, its entropy has increased. It is less organized than before and the universe is richer in randomness. Entropy is the one thing we're always getting plenty of—and which we don't want!

The heat-death of the universe, a final state of all things often visualized by the Sunday supplement scientists, is really the ultimate end of all things. So far as we know presently, this will be the end of all things, unless somewhere in the vast universe there is some agency which transcends the second Law and which decreases entropy. Scientists don't think there is anything like that—but it would be nice if there were. Maybe then, the universe would really end in a blaze of glory—instead of the gradual ticking out of an unwound watch...

IS HE KIDDING ?

By JUNE LURIE

WHEN ARGENTINA'S Peron boastfully announced the generation of a "new form" of atomic energy, developed by the Austrian physicist R. Richter, that announcement was greeted with considerable skepticism in atomic laboratories around the world. It is only fair to say, however, that the skepticism was reserved primarily for the suggestion by Peron that the development was one of industrial magnitude. As far as the basic discovery goes, most physicists felt and still feel a genuine curiosity as to whether or not Richter has actually made a "pilot plant" Sun!

Peron implied in his announcement that Richter had duplicated the Sun's hydrogen-helium cycle, which, if true, is an important scientific development, for atomic laboratories all over the world—even the big ones here—are quite interested in that possibility. It is known that physicists are working on the hydrogen bomb, which is in essence a duplication of the Sun's cycle. Information so far unclassified has led everyone to believe that the cycle must nec-

essarily be started by high temperatures such as are found only in the core of an exploding uranium atomic bomb. And, since Peron in Argentina has no uranium explosives, the skepticism is understandable. Understandable too is the interest, for Richter may well have discovered some method of making a hydrogen-helium cycle take place without the ghastly temperatures of the atomic bomb. If this is the case, atomic science will have progressed by one grand leap.

Unfortunately, in this day of "secret science" there is no way to learn the details, and our own scientists will have to determine the merits of Richter's work by duplication—or failure. Since Richter's reputation as a physicist is rather good, it seems unlikely he would permit such an announcement to be made if it were not founded in fact; therefore we can expect a rash of high-powered experimenting on energies of exploding uranium. Thus we may have moved one step closer to harnessing atomic power for peace!

RETURN ENGAGEMENT

By H. B. Hickey



The Earthmen were looking forward to the game against the Venusians. But they didn't know what being the winner could mean . . .

IT WAS Slinky Peele's year. From the hinterlands his scouts sent him the material, to be paid for in cash and in scholarships and in soft jobs like mowing the dean's lawn once a month. And Slinky fashioned a lightning backfield and an iron line and he had three men on All-America and five on All-Conference.

His salary was equal to that of the president of the college where Slinky coached football, and five times that of Professor Giraldi, whose work on sub-viruses was remaking biology.

They said he was greater even than Rockne, and his ghost writer wrote a book called CHARACTER

BUILDING THROUGH CONTACT SPORTS and Slinky autographed them and collected royalties on a million copies.

He was a Moulder of Men.

They built him a new stadium and put his picture on the front pages every other day. When his team beat Northwestern, it crowded a Moon crash onto the second page. The day the miners struck on Mars was the day Slinky beat Army, and the Federal mediator was angry because he had to see the last half of the game on teleradar on a rocket ship.

He was Everybody's Hero.

He sat in his office and faced a boy



Three plays after the first, Peele's substitutes stopped the Venusian quarterback—and at half-time, the score between the two teams was even

who had played two years on his team and then had cracked a kneecap taking out an end. The boy limped back and forth distractedly.

"But, Coach," he pleaded, "I only got one year to finish school. Why did they take that job away from me?"

"Now, Pete, you know that's an athletic scholarship. Jorgen's on the team and you're not."

"You mean now I can't play any more football. I can just go back where I came from, is that it?"

"Don't put it that way, son." He got up and moved his bulk around the desk and put a beefy paw on Pete's shoulder. "You've got to learn to take the bad breaks, son."

The boy pushed his hand away.

"Yeah? Well, maybe the papers would like to know how come that Crydo got his head cracked in the Michigan game!"

Peele's paternal manner vanished. His eyes, sunk in fat, grew small and hard and shiny.

"Did I tell you to crack his head?"

"Just as well as! You told me and Hammer to—"

"I told you to take him out. That's all. If you hurt him deliberately, that's your fault, not mine. Remember that. Now get out of here, you punk!"

He was still angry when he appeared a half hour later in the locker room. What he saw brought more angry color to his cheeks. Instead of being dressed and ready for practice, the players were standing around in

their shorts, reading newspapers.

"Well, look who's learned to read! And from the way you ran those diagrams yesterday, I thought none of you even knew your ABC's!"

Having caught them off guard, startling them, he turned his ire on each of them individually. "You'll have lots of time to read, Koval, if you don't get the lead out of your pants! Another game like Saturday's, and—"

"Coach," his captain interrupted. Peele glared at him. "Looks like some of us won't be playing much more football. It says here the Rocket Corps is starting a draft on account of this Venus thing."

VENUS HAD been great. Venus had been the Moon and Mars all over again. The ships had landed and the men had come out and put up their right hands in a friendly way and said, "How," and passed around the chocolate bars.

And the Venusians had found the sounds of friendship pleasant. They had enjoyed the chocolate and the soft drinks, especially the soft drinks, the Venusian climate being what it was.

Venus had been great. In two days, with permission to dig a few exploratory holes, a prospector had shovelled out five hundred pounds of uranium. And when the local inhabitants had complained, he'd given them a whole case of root beer and promised never to do it again. The next day he'd dug out six hundred pounds.

It was like that all the way, everyone getting rich and having a great time. And some of the miners had got drunk and tried to sneak into the locked Venusian cities to get at the women.

And then one morning all the Earth men were dead and the rockets were blown into bits and the com-

pounds were burned and broken up. All this had happened during the night.

"They say they ain't sorry and they ain't gonna pay damages and they don't care if we're sore because they don't want any further part of us," the captain of Peele's team said.

"Those dirty, sneaking, murdering rats!" Peele shouted.

He was thinking what a draft would do to him with five tough games to go. He could kiss the conference title goodbye. Also an undefeated season. Also the Rose Bowl.

"My cousin Joe," Koval said. "He was up there. I don't think I'll wait for the draft."

"Me neither," said Campbell, the All-American guard.

"We oughta go sign up all together, as a team," someone suggested. "We might get on the same ship."

"Those dirty, murdering scum!" Slinky Peele moaned. "We should never have treated them human."

"My cousin Joe wrote he never did trust them," Koval said. "Always acting high and mighty. Those..." His big hands twisted savagely.

Maybe Campbell would stay, Peele thought. Campbell was married. But what about the rest?

"They ought to be wiped out," he muttered.

"Can I quote you on that?" a new voice inquired. It was Tanner, a sports columnist. "Coach Peele says 'Wipe Them Out!'"

"Who let you in here?" Peele shouted. "No! Don't quote me. If you want to, say I think it's all a misunderstanding."

"That's what the president said yesterday."

"Do I have to be smarter than the president?" Peele demanded.

Still, it would be nice to be quoted on the situation. Thirty million people

read Tanner's column every day. Be a shame to miss the publicity.

"And how's the character-building?" Tanner inquired. "Maybe you'd like to tell the readers how a knee in an opposing tackle's face improves his character?"

Peele disregarded that. Tanner didn't like him, but he'd use anything that had some reader interest. And an idea was coming.

"It's a misunderstanding," he said, his mind working laboriously. "That's what. Like a football game, with each team playing different rules. We got to get acquainted with each other's rules."

Tanner's brows lifted. "Not bad," he admitted. "I could use that. Maybe even build it up. 'Coach Peele Advocates Rules Conference'. Or maybe, 'Football Can Save World, Peele Says'."

The columnist shuddered. "Lord, sometimes I could puke at myself. You ever feel like that?" He laughed. "No, not you."

Peele would have liked to have the boys throw Tanner out. Or even do the job himself. But you had to be nice to thirty million readers.

And besides, Tanner had given him an idea. And what an idea!

He wasn't licked yet. Not by a long way. Let the draft come. Let it ruin every other team, it wouldn't hurt him. Coach Peele would be greater than ever!

"Listen!" he said. "Listen to this...."

THE VENUSIAN emissary sat stiff and unyielding, his orange eyes glowing like coals in his death mask face. The cooler air of Earth had made his skin taut, and it looked like rubber sheeting splattered with blobs of candle-wax.

One taste had been enough. His people wanted no more. If war must

come, then let it come. They had had enough of broken promises.

"I admit you have just grievances," said the Secretary for Interplanetary Affairs. "But it does appear that you accepted seriously many things which were plainly said in jest."

"Venus is a harsh planet," the emissary said. "We make no jests. When we say something, we mean it literally."

"So do we, usually. That's just the point. If we could resume relations, I think we'd come to understand each other better."

"No, thank you."

The Secretary was a patient man. He said, "Let me make a suggestion. I know your people don't want conflict—"

"We do not."

"Good. A point of agreement. Now, here's my thought: we know almost nothing about each other's culture. That's a barrier."

"Perhaps not. The more we know, the less we may like each other."

"Well, maybe so. But why not try to get together in some small area where nothing vital is at stake?"

"I have explained," the Venusian told him, "that with us, everything is important. We have no humor, no jests, nothing which is non-survival."

"Then in some field where no great harm could be done. You might find you could learn something of value from us."

"I doubt it."

"Well, at least that we do have a code of ethics, that we can keep our word. Tell me, do you have sports?"

"Sports?"

"Yes, contests of physical strength and skill." The Secretary went on at length, explaining the great value Earth people placed on such contests.

At last the Venusian nodded. "We have such things. Not often, and then

only to prove the greater survival value of one theory of health and strength over another. Such contests are taken very seriously by our people."

"By us too." The Secretary rose. "I'd like you to meet someone now."

He pushed a button on his desk and said, "Send in Mr. Peele."

AFTER QUITE a bit of talking by Slinky Peele, the Venusian got the idea. Whether or not he liked it was another question, the answer to which could not be told by looking at his unchanging expression.

"You wish us, then," he said at last, "to select eleven young men and teach them this football game of yours. And they would then engage in a contest with the football team tutored by Mr. Peele. Is that correct?"

"That's it," Peele said. "Of course, you folks would be at a disadvantage, the game being new to you. But we could send up a coach to help train your boys."

"That would not be necessary. We could learn from your books and moving pictures and from your book of rules, which you say you will supply."

"Everything you need, including equipment."

The Venusian thought it over again. "You understand that this would be a serious matter to us."

"You'll find us good sports," Peele said jovially. "We'll bear no grudge if we lose."

"And you think such a contest would really help?"

"I believe it would promote understanding," the Secretary said.

"Frankly, I do not see how. But also, frankly, Venus has no desire for armed conflict. I will submit it to our Council by Lunar radiophone."

"Good," the Secretary beamed.

Halfway to the door, the Venusian paused. "The loser to provide the victory feast after the contest, of course."

"Great idea!" Peele agreed. "That's a real sporting proposition!" He rushed forward and pumped the Venusian's hand. "It's a bet!"

When the Venusian had left the room, Peele chortled. "Well, looks like we put it across."

"Mr. Peele," the Secretary murmured. "Before you go, I have something to say to you."

"Yes?"

"I have investigated your reputation. It is not unblemished."

"Everybody hates a winner," Peele snorted.

"Nevertheless, bear this in mind. A great deal hinges on this game. If you enter into this with any private gain in mind, you'd better reconsider now."

"Sir, it is my belief that sports are an integral part of—"

"Never mind the speeches. And remember this particularly: whatever agreements or promises are made must be kept to the letter."

"That's the whole idea, isn't it?" Peele demanded righteously.

"I repeat, to the letter. The lives of millions may depend upon it. Weigh every action, every word. And once you say something, no matter how trivial, do it!"

Peele's smile had not left his face. It was better than he'd thought it would be. "Sure, sure," he said. And then to the point. "I'll want to keep my team intact, so they'll know exactly—"

"Deferments will be arranged."

"Oh? I hadn't thought of that, but it would probably be a good idea."

He went out rubbing his thick hands together.

IT WAS A great year for Slinky Peele, Moulder of Men and Build-

er of Character. He was The Coach, he was Mr. Football, he was Sports as a Way of Life.

He came to believe it himself.

In the stadium he was cheered by hundreds of thousands. And they were right to do so. He had taken a very serious situation and showed that if you looked at it properly, it was just a game.

More than that, they all knew in their hearts that Slinky Peele would Show Them. Exactly what he would show them nobody knew, but they were sure he would.

So the crisp autumn days rolled past and Slinky Peele's team won games and the bands played and the people cheered. And then one day word came that the Venusians were ready.

They came a week before the date of the game. In the middle of the night, their rocket landed, and by morning they were established in the hotel which had been emptied of all other residents.

Every member of the Venusian team carried a copy of the rule book wherever he went. "Because," the Venusian emissary said, "they are the same rules for all, and we must abide by them, must we not?"

In his next interview with the press, Slinky Peele said, "It shows they're learning."

He made speeches about Understanding and Sportsmanship, and he sent an assistant to spy on the Venusians at practise. Because, after all, how would it look if he lost to a team that was playing its first real game?

"Well?" he demanded when Doherty, the assistant, reported back.

"Not bad," Doherty said. "They're not tricky, but they've got the fundamentals down perfect. Their best plays will be straight off tackle, a spinner

through the middle and a short pass over center."

"Go run the boys through those," Peele ordered. "I've got to meet the Venusian coach for the newsreels."

The Venusian coach was a small man, very thin and scholarly looking. Peele was cordial and quite courteous, not getting between the smaller man and the cameras too often.

"Now that you've had a little experience with the great sport of football, what do you think of it?" he asked.

"It is stupid," the Venusian said.

Peele gasped, the color beginning to flood his cheeks.

"The skills involved have little application to life," the other went on pedantically. "Intelligence is not required, and while the development of certain muscle groups is exaggerated, others are neglected. Furthermore, while teamwork is stressed, I note that certain players, because of their positions, must of necessity be more conspicuous."

The cameras ground and the sound recording equipment recorded the heresy and Slinky Peele quivered with rage, thinking of the millions who would see and hear this.

"I suppose you must have been quite an athlete yourself to be picked as coach," he said ironically.

"No. I am the creator of the present Venusian system of physical health and training, which bears my own name, Qrrr!"

"Well, they must think it's the best system," Peele shrugged.

"Obviously. I would not be here otherwise." Then, looking Peele over carefully, he said, "Your girth seems to have grown with the vanquishing of many proponents of other systems."

One of the cameramen guffawed and Peele growled deep in his throat. He was sensitive about his weight, and

about the fact that his name, Slinky, referred to mental rather than physical qualities.

Nevertheless, he fought down a show of anger. "Well, here's luck," he said, extending his hand. "I hope you won't feel too bad if you lose."

Qrrl shrugged his narrow shoulders.

"It is not a matter of emotion," he said. "If your system proves to have greater survival value, we will simply adopt it."

He nodded perfunctorily. "I must go now. It is time for our team to have it's breathing exercise."

To himself, Peele thought: Save some for the game. You'll need it.

THE DAY was clear and crisp. The band marched around the field and the cheerleaders cavorted and the immense crowd cheered. Then the band disappeared, and in accordance with custom the visiting team came onto the field.

First they did breathing exercises, then they rolled on the ground. Then they did an exercise that looked like a hula dance.

Everybody laughed, especially Slinky Peele.

Then the home team came out and went through their own drill; kicking, passing, rolling with precision through a series of mock plays.

And at last it was quiet. The Venusians had won the toss and had elected to receive the kick-off. With solemn faces, they took up their positions.

The ball was in the air, turning end over end. Following it came Peele's team, a wave of scarlet and yellow.

On the goal line, the Venusian quarterback caught the ball. His interference formed quickly ahead of him as he moved. He picked up speed.

Television announcers said, "The five, the ten, the twenty, the thirty, the forty...."

There was only one man standing in the midst of a vast silence. It was the Venusian quarterback, just over the goal line. Behind him, twenty-one men sprawled on the field.

It was a perfect play. Everyone rose and cheered. Everyone except Slinky Peele. He sat on the bench and cursed softly as the Venusians lined up and kicked the extra point.

He cursed again as his own team received and the ball carrier was down on the twenty yard line. In three plays his team gained four yards. They kicked.

The Venusian quarterback caught the ball and ran sixty yards for another touchdown. He also kicked the extra point.

Peele sent in substitutes with orders to stop that quarterback. Three plays later, they stopped him. He was carried off the field. A few plays later, the Venusians lost the services of a halfback.

Their replacements were not quite as capable. At half-time, the score remained the same.

PEELE gave the team a pep talk.

"You slobs," he said. "Maybe you're satisfied to let them make suckers out of you, but they're not gonna make a sucker out of me!"

He glared at Koval and called him a few choice names which could never be printed in a newspaper.

"You're the guy who wanted to get your hands on them! You haven't got past that guard once!"

"He's tough," Koval said. "And there's something with his eyes. Dirt don't seem to bother them."

"You got fingers, haven't you?" Peele demanded.

The thought of losing this game sickened him. Even if he pulled it out of the fire, it would be bad enough. But for Slinky Peele to lose to a team playing its first football game!

"I don't care how you do it," Peele said. "But do it! You gonna let those sneaking, murdering rats get the best of you? Are you just a bunch of yellow punks?"

He closed with a brief dissertation on their ancestry and a few obscenities.

"**THEY** LOOK like a new team," the television announcer said. "Coach Peele must have given them one of his famous, inspiring talks.

"Oh, oh. The Venusian right tackle is down. That makes two men they've lost in the last two plays."

He choked over the tackle's name. "But don't get me wrong. Our boys are playing clean ball, but they're playing hard, that's all."

Fifteen minutes later, with the score tied, he said, "Oh, oh. The Venusian right guard is injured. Too bad. He's played a whale of a game. There goes Coach Peele to make sure he's all right and to pat him on the back as he's helped off the field. Wonderful gesture, isn't it?"

By the end of the third quarter, the game was in the bag and Peele had made several more gestures. The Venusian team was beaten to a frazzle. In the last five minutes, with his team leading by three touchdowns, Peele let them coast.

"A wonderful game," he said later before the cameras. He was flanked by the Venusian coach and the emissary. "I want to congratulate Coach Qrrl."

"Congradulate me?" the slender Venusian gasped. He shrank back, refusing to accept Peele's handshake. Bowing, he said, "I must go now to prepare for tonight."

"See you at the banquet," Peele chortled.

There was a momentary chill cast over the proceedings by the look of horror he got from the coach and the

emissary. They hurried away, leaving him alone with the cameras and the reporters.

"I hate to say this," Peele murmured, "but they're not very good sports. After all, it's only a game."

"Coach," a reporter asked, "what are the chances for a return game?"

"It was something Peele hadn't thought of, but it looked like a wonderful idea.

"I think we ought to have one," he said. "We can't expect them to understand the principles of sportsmanship so quickly. Besides, it's only fair to give them a chance to get even."

The more he thought of it, the better the idea seemed. He searched his mind for a few noble phrases with which to further the plan. The next game could be played on Venus, and for the chance to make a trip like that, there would be lots of boys wanting to play for Slinky Peele. Material would be no problem for the next few seasons.

"Coach," a reporter interrupted his thoughts, "were you worried at all when they jumped to such a quick lead?"

"Worried?" Peele snorted. "Ha ha. Besides, what if we lost? It's only a game, isn't it?"

And then he could not resist a jibe. "Not as stupid or simple as that Qrrl thought, though. I guess they learned something from us, all right."

AT THE banquet that evening, it seemed to Slinky Peele that he had never felt so good. The first course of the Venusian feast had consisted of liquors, strange but pleasant. Only one thing was lacking for Peele, the presence of the opposing coach.

Leaning across the table, he said to the Venusian envoy, "Where's Coach Qrrl?"

"He will be here," the emissary

promised, sounding somewhat annoyed with Peele.

But by the end of the second course, which consisted of ices, Qrrl had still not made an appearance. Peele leaned close to Tanner, who was sitting at his right.

"Think the guy could be jerk enough not to show up at all?" he whispered. "What a bunch of bum sports. Look how solemn they are."

Through the third and fourth courses, which consisted of vegetables and a strange soup, Peele felt his irritation rising. He'd wanted to ask Qrrl, publicly, what he thought of his system of physical training now.

To the Venusian across the table, he said, "Isn't Qrrl coming?"

The emissary stared at him as through he were a monster. "Are you not able to wait? He will be here soon enough."

The Venusian envoy rose and bowed to the Secretary for Interplanetary Affairs, to the two teams, to the reporters and to Peele.

"Coach Peele wishes to say something, and while it is contrary to our custom to have speeches at such feasts, permission is granted."

Peele got up, a bit unsteady. "I want to congratulate our opponents," he said. "And I want to propose a return engagement."

"But why?" the envoy asked. "You have proved the superiority of your methods. We shall adopt them."

"Well, you've probably learned a lot from this game today. Maybe next time you'd beat us."

The Venusian was thoughtful. "It is true we learned much today. And I do not doubt that next time we would be victorious."

"Don't be that sure," Peele laughed. "Coach Qrrl was sure about today's game, and look what happened to him."

"I do not think I shall ever under-

stand what you call humor," the Venusian snapped.

THE SECRETARY for Interplanetary Affairs rose hurriedly. "Mr. Peele means nothing by his words," he soothed.

"Nevertheless, it is in bad taste."

"Talk about sore losers," Peele whispered to Tanner.

"Should we consent to another contest," the envoy was saying, "would it be played on Venus?"

"That seems fair," the Secretary agreed.

"Under the same rules, against Coach Peele and his team, with the same provision for the victory feast?"

Peele, ever on the alert for a slur, popped up: "Don't you think our rules and regulations are good enough?"

"I discovered a certain latitude was allowed—"

"Well, if my boys played too rough..." Peele snorted.

"We are not afraid, if that is what you mean!"

The Venusian's eyes were burning, the orange flickering like flame. The Secretary for Interplanetary Affairs was looking daggers at Peele, twitching his eyebrows in the signal to keep quiet.

"No," the envoy grated, "we are not afraid. And since you desire so much another contest, perhaps we may have one. Everything but the site to remain the same, is that correct?"

"Suits me," Peele said. He stirred his fork around in his meat sauce. "What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander," he pontificated.

"Then I shall radiophone our Council for consent," the envoy said. "We should have their reply soon."

There was a long silence after that. It was the sixth course, the meat course, and Peele found his meat tough and stringy, although well seasoned. He chomped his way through sev-

eral slices, half elated because it looked as though the return game would go through, and half under a cloud of gloom because the Secretary kept shooting him warning glances.

AFTER THE meat, there were fruit and nuts of Venusian varieties, and finally some cool liqueurs. When the last of these was served, the Venusian envoy rose.

"I propose this toast," he said solemnly, "to Coach Peele, whose system of training has proved superior, and to Qrrl, for although his system proved inferior, he served us long and well."

Under cover of his glass, Peele, said, "I knew he wouldn't show up."

And then the toast had been drunk and the envoy had whispered to one of his men and had then announced that the Council had approved the second contest. Everyone applauded and the banquet was over.

Slinky Peele smiled a satisfied smile.

"See you on Venus," he said to the envoy as he prepared to leave. "Better luck next time."

"I hope so," the Venusian said. "I hope so." He put out his hand and ran it over Peele's arm and shoulders and paunch. "Yes indeed, I hope so."

"And I promise you," Peele said, "that if I lose, I'll still come to the banquet. Not like Qrrl."

Over his shoulder, the Secretary said meaningfully, "And whatever Coach Peele promises, he will fulfill."

The Venusian looked puzzled. "But why do you say that about Qrrl?"

"Why didn't he come?"

"But he did! As we promised, the loser provided the feast."

"You mean he cooked it?" Peele blurted.

"Of course not. According to our laws, he who advances his system as the best and enters into a contest where men may be injured, must provide the food if he loses. Qrrl was the meat course."

"He..." Peele felt suddenly sick at his stomach.

"A bit stringy, despite our best efforts." The Venusian stared at Peele's expansive waistline. "I am sure you will be better."

He nodded to the Secretary, smiled at Slinky Peele. "We shall see you on Venus," he said, and was gone.

Peele looked at the Secretary and the Secretary looked ill. But his eyes held no hope for Slinky Peele.

THE END

ROCKET BOMB

● ● ● By CLINT AVERS

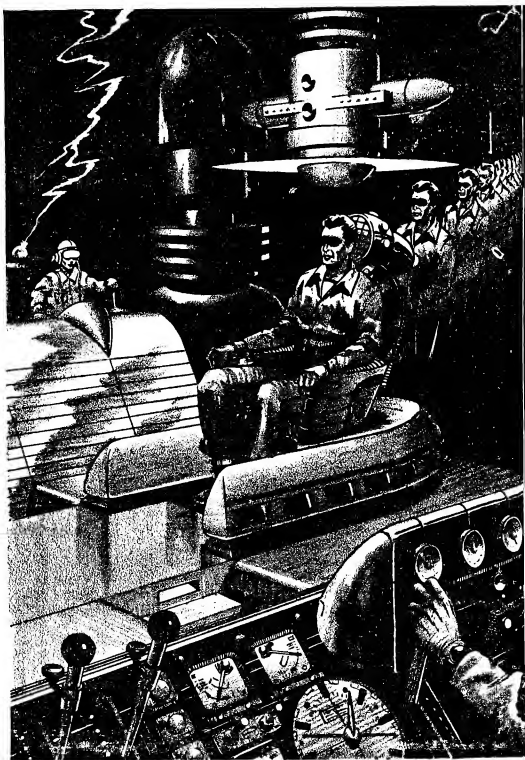
ORDINARY BOMBS, while mighty devastating when used in quantity, primarily do surface damage with little penetration. This is simply a result of the fact that they acquire a velocity limited by their shape, air resistance and gravity. At best, such aerial bombs fall on their target with a velocity of only a few hundred miles per hour, not enough to penetrate and damage well constructed armored turrets or bunkers.

This is being rapidly changed by use of a booster rocket. A powder rocket is attached to the tail of a conventional bomb (with certain balance modifications) and a fusing mechanism is built in to fire the falling rocket when a short distance above

the ground. The result is that the falling bomb changes from a casually dropping object to a furious projectile of penetrating destruction capable of going through heavily armored surfaces such as thick concrete bunkers, battleship decks and similar protected objects.

The idea is really not new, but the application is fairly original. It, in effect, changes a projectile like the bomb from a freely falling object to a true projectile-type, driven by powerful force—the secret probably lies in some sort of a time or proximity fused apparatus, which can sense the right distance above the ground to provide the desired thrust.

* * *





When another world finds a way to
turn one honest Earthman into a dozen
traitors — then it's time to call in . . .

THE HATCHETMAN

By
Mack Reynolds
and
Fredric Brown

MATT ANDERS, arrived at the New Albuquerque Spaceport on Venus in the early afternoon. His identification papers showed him to be one Harvey Giles: merchant, Philadelphia, Earth. Purpose of visit to Venus: purchase of precious stones. He was tall, but stooped with age; his gray hair and seamed face matched the photographs on his identification papers. Any resemblance to the real Matt Anders was impossible to detect.

ders was impossible to detect.

He let the mechanics roll away the one-man Spacezephyr, while the two guards who had come to meet him escorted him to the administration building where his identification papers were checked and approved. After that, he was free to leave, carrying his brief case containing—except for one secret pocket—only papers pertaining to his assumed identity.

A landcab swung in to pick him up. He hesitated momentarily and then waved the driver away. The residence of the Terran ambassador was less than half a mile distant, and a chance for exercise would be more than welcome after thirty-five hours in the tiny spacecraft. He took a deep breath of the exhilarating Venusian air and started down the street.

He felt no sense of danger. It was broad daylight and New Albuquerque is a safe, well-policed city. His disguise was impenetrable. Only a few people on Earth—and those were men in positions of high trust—knew of his presence here or the form of his disguise. The various unorganized crackpots and malcontents who hated him could not possibly know. And aggression on the part of the Martian Duplies, here on Venus, Anders didn't even consider. Mars was trying her best to keep Venus from taking sides in the strange cold war she was waging with Earth—a war in which neither side had made a direct move against the home planet of the other, although millions of men had died in space and in attacks on outposts. Certainly Mars would not risk antagonizing Venus by any overt act on the neutral planet.

So it was the very unexpectedness of the attack against him that enabled it to succeed. For a moment, except for him, the street was empty. Except for him and for the landcab that had

offered to pick him up back at the spaceport. It must have followed him unobtrusively for some distance, and now it contained three men besides the driver. It swung up against the curb beside him and disgorged its occupants; two men tried to pinion his arms; the other swung an old-fashioned blackjack.

Matt Anders dropped his brief case and tried to swing with his right at the Duplie holding his other arm. The blow was ineffectual, but it was the movement on his own part that caused the sap in the hands of the third man to accomplish less than had been intended. He was dazed by the blow, his knees buckled and he fell, but he didn't completely lose consciousness.

The Duplies who had hold of his arms lifted him and carried him to the landcab. The one who had used the blackjack took a quick look up and down the street, picked up the brief case and followed them into the cab.

The whole thing had taken only seconds. And now he was between two of them in the rear seat and, leaning past the one to his right, the third man bent toward him. Now his hand held a hypodermic needle instead of the blackjack. Anders caught a fuzzy glimpse of it from a corner of his eye as the Duplie poised the needle to plunge it into his arm. He didn't know what it meant. Not death, most likely, because if they'd merely wanted to kill him they could easily have finished him off back there on the street without taking the risk of carrying him into the cab.

THE LANDCAB swung sharply around a corner, and as it swerved Anders managed to press against the man on his right. He twisted his body so that the plunger of the small hypo was depressed. It

lost a full half of its contents on his coat before he felt the prick of the needle. He jerked involuntarily at that, and the wielder of the hypo laughed. "Coming out of the fog, huh? Well, that shot'll take you right back in again."

The driver spoke back over his shoulder. "He didn't come to, did he? We don't want him to remember anything beyond the blackjack."

"He wasn't awake; just jerked when he got the needle."

But he was awake, and stayed awake. He was dazed, sick, dull-minded, but still conscious and determined to stay that way. Fighting against giving in to the darkness to which his mind wanted to succumb as the contents of the hypo spread through his blood stream. He lay inert and motionless, deliberately breathing slowly and regularly, hiding every outward evidence of the fight his mind was putting up against unconsciousness.

It grew dark suddenly and he knew they had driven into a garage. The grip on his arms tightened again and he was half dragged, half carried, from the landcab. He allowed himself to open his eyes a mere slit, enough to make out his surroundings. Sure enough, they were in a garage and he was being hauled toward steps leading downward at the back of it.

"Shake it up," one of his captors said. "We're ten seconds behind schedule now. And don't worry about mussing the guy; he's supposed to be banged up plenty."

They hurried him down the cellar steps into a lighted room, a typical under-residence room that contained the standard heating apparatus and laundry equipment of the twenty-second century—and the typical trash and odds and ends that clutter a basement in any century whatever. But at the far end of the cellar, screened

from view until they rounded a pile of packing crates, was an object that surprised Anders so much that he almost revealed his consciousness.

It was a Kingston Duplicator. An illegal, jerry-built one, here in New Albuquerque.

He knew all too well the character of the Duplies, products of the Duplicator. Their complete egotism, their utter lack of any moral sense whatsoever, their cold viciousness and inhumanity. But he was still amazed that they'd have the utter gall to construct an illegal machine of their own here on Venus.

Back of the Duplicator itself was a huge condenser of a type he'd never seen before, something the Duplies themselves must have developed for the purpose. They could load a condenser of that size with enough juice to operate the Duplicator once by feeding it current a little at a time over a period of weeks, so there would be no sudden great drain of power that would give away to the authorities the presence and use of a Duplicator. It was a clever idea, Anders had to admit to himself. As far as he knew, nobody had used it before. Why, with the use of an attachment like that, there could be Duplicators in any city on Earth, undetected and undetectable.

He knew now all too well what they were going to do to him. If he'd had the least bit of strength, he'd have tried a break then and there. But the combined effects of the blackjack and the drug had left him only an edge of consciousness. He couldn't have stood on his own feet and walked out, even if they'd let go of him. He'd have to wait a later opportunity—not that he really expected to get one.

The machine, he'd seen at first glance, was adjusted for human duplication-transmission. They strapped

him into the chair—for all the world like an old-fashioned electric chair except that it had no electrodes—that was bolted to the field platform.

When the switch was thrown there'd be a duplicate of him on Mars—except that duplicate would be a Duplie instead of a human being. It would be exactly like him in every way, except that it would lack that intangible ingredient "soul", that ingredient man had never been too sure he had until the Kingston Duplicator had proved it to him—and had created chaos in the process.

CHAPTER II

TROUBLE COMES DOUBLE

VENUS HAD been the first planet colonized. The first explorers to penetrate its eternal cloud envelope had found, to everyone's surprise, a breathable atmosphere. This had been hidden from the spectroscopes of Earth's astronomers by the peculiar constitution of that cloud envelope which hid Venus' surface from the observation of Earth.

The colonization of Mars had not been possible until almost a century later. There had been only experimental outposts there, under domes, until the technology of the late twenty-first century had provided the means of creating an artificial atmosphere. This was done by concentrating what oxygen there was in a narrow band close to the surface instead of letting it diffuse itself through the entire depth of atmosphere. Held close to the ground, it made Mars habitable, except for mountainous or plateau areas.

By that time, constant travel between Earth and Venus had caused interplanetary travel to develop to the point where it was easy and inexpensive, and the colonization of Mars had been very rapid. It had been a spontaneous emigration of the common

people that had caused Mars, for a while, to suffer from a lack of trained scientists and statesmen—a lack of qualified leadership. Men who had achieved success and eminence on Earth did not care to emigrate.

That's where the Kingston Duplicator had come in; it had seemed to be a perfect answer to Mars' problem. It had enabled men like Duclos, Kingston himself, Barry, Wade and hundreds of others—the men who had contributed most to the science and political leadership of Earth—to remain at home on Earth, and to have duplicates of themselves sent to Mars. The Duplies were to contribute to the advancement of Mars what their originals had contributed and were contributing to the advancement of Earth.

There was a catch, but nobody knew about it until too late.

The Kingston Duplicator had been invented early in the twenty-second century. One Duplicator, adjustable either as transmitter or receiver, could send to another—at either close range or interplanetary distances—a duplicate of any object placed in the field of the transmitting machine. It did not involve, of course, any creation of matter. The receiving machine drew upon a hopper of anything at all, usually sand, which was transmuted electronically into whatever elements were needed for creation of the duplicate.

With respect to inanimate objects, the Kingston Duplicator had only one theoretical limitation; one that was learned the hard way. Fissionable material, even in less than critical quantities, could not be transmitted-duplicated without exploding in the sending machine.

The Duplicator had, of course, changed the economy of Earth (and of Venus and Mars) but not completely, not too greatly. The tremendous amount of power it required prevented

its practical use for the reproduction of anything except expensive and valuable things. Of what benefit to reproduce a bushel of wheat or a chair at a cost of a thousand dollars' worth of power when you can grow the wheat or make the chair much more cheaply? On the other hand, a five-thousand-dollar mink coat becomes less of a luxury item when it can be duplicated for a fifth of that sum; small precision instruments, very valuable relative to weight, became cheaper in duplication; rare metals and elements (except the fissionable ones) became less prohibitively expensive and thereby opened new fields to technology.

The government had made one restriction to protect the investment of those who had money invested in precious stones: diamonds, except those necessary for industrial use, were restricted.

SO WERE human beings. Early experiments with lesser animals had shown that duplication of them was quite possible, without apparent harm to the animals—and also without commercial possibilities, since it remained cheaper to raise a pig than to duplicate it. But before a single human being had been duplicated by a Kingston Duplicator, governments acting in concert ruled against the attempt.

If for no other reason, there would be too many legal difficulties involved in the duplication of a human being. A wife could find herself with duplicate identical husbands; a job or a bank account or an insurance policy would find itself with duplicate identical claimants. And which was the original and what would be the rights of the duplicate? And, besides, there was no logical reason for permitting the duplication of a human being.

Until the lack of technicians and leaders in the new Martian colonies suggested an advantage to human du-

plication that seemed, if proper restrictions were observed, the perfect answer to the problem. Suppose Duclos, top electronics engineer of Earth—and electronics engineers were badly needed on Mars—agreed to have a duplicate of himself created on and for Mars. Duclos had nothing to lose—except that he signed a paper agreeing never to leave Earth, which he had no desire to do anyway. His duplicate would be required to agree never to leave Mars. The Martian government would give the Duplie an amount of money equal to whatever the original possessed. Only men with no close family ties could be chosen. As long as they remained as far apart as Earth and Mars, there could be no conflict of personal interests between them.

It seemed foolproof, and the experiment was permitted. Duclos was duplicated. His Duplie took over electronics development on Mars—and voiced no objection to his lot. Wade, top man in interplanetary economics. Kingston, inventor of the Duplicator, acquired a duplicate on Mars. Several hundred others, top men in every other important field.

Then the catch. The unsuspected missing ingredient.

The first of the Duplies had concealed, cleverly, their essential non-humanness, their plans, until the quota had been filled. Then—all of them—starting with those in positions of power at the top—they had taken over Mars. And few of the human people of Mars knew or even suspected that they had been taken over. There were top statesmen, top propagandists, among the Duplies.

And now Mars was at war with Earth. A peculiar war...

STRAPPED IN the chair, Matt Anders suddenly realized that he should have fought his captors, even

without chance of winning, on the off chance that he might have been killed in the struggle. Until this moment, he hadn't realized how much better it would have been to die rather than to be duplicated on Mars. For his duplicate would—at least after indoctrination—be on their side. And his duplicate would know every political and military secret of Earth known to him, Matt Anders, right-hand man, hatchetman extraordinary, of Dwight Morphy, President of the Council of Nations of Earth. The top secrets, just about all of them of Terran policy and planning. It wasn't only his ability, valuable as that alone would be to them, that they were duplicating; it was his knowledge.

The instant he realized that, he would have rushed to commit suicide, had there been any possible way for him to do so before they threw the switch.

For a second, blinding light played around him, but he felt nothing. Except for the slight temporary pain in his eyes from the light—and that could have been avoided by a blindfold—duplication was painless, without sensation.

Then, the sudden aftereffect that had been noticed in every living thing, animal or human, who had been duplicated—temporary unconsciousness that would last a few minutes. He felt himself slipping into it and he knew, and was past caring, that in his case he'd never waken from it. Now that they'd duplicated him, they'd kill him quickly before he came out of the aftereffect, before they even unstrapped him from the chair. The last thing he knew was that somebody was telling somebody else to hurry damn it hurry, and then the blackness and the blankness came....

SOMEONE WAS shaking his shoulder gently. Someone was saying,

"Are you hurt badly? Was it a hit-and-run car? Should I call an ambulance?"

Matt Anders sat up groggily. He was at the point along the street where he had been attacked. He looked about him; his hat was lying in the gutter and his brief case was where he had dropped it during the brief struggle. The landcab wasn't in sight.

There wasn't any evidence at all that he'd been kidnaped and then returned to the same spot where the assault had occurred. And they thought he'd been unconscious since that first blow with the blackjack; he wasn't supposed to know that anything besides the assault had happened; he wasn't supposed to know that he'd been duplicated.

And he hadn't any proof, except his own word, that he had been. The Venusian authorities would tell him his story was fantastic—and it would sound that way. It was fantastic that there could be an illegal, private Duplicator, operated by Duplies, here in orderly and peaceful New Albuquerque. He himself could hardly believe what had happened. The Venusian authorities would accuse him of lying in order to create an interplanetary episode.

"Are you all right?" somebody said. "Shall I call an ambulance?"

He put his hand to the back of his head as he turned to look up. The man standing behind him was small, mild, inoffensive. A typical clerk or bookkeeper from one of the government offices.

"I'm all right," Anders said. "I'll be all right in a minute. Just a sore noggin from a sap."

"A sap? Oh, you mean a—a blunt weapon? Were you attacked and robbed?"

Had they been that thorough? He put his hand into the pocket where

he'd carried money. It was gone. They'd been thorough enough to make it look like an assault and robbery. Not that the money mattered; once he was out of his disguise, his signature was good for any reasonable amount at any Venusian bank. But the valuable information in his brief case—No, they wouldn't have bothered tampering with that. The papers in the secret compartment were valuable only for the information on them, and that information was in his head as well. It would also be in the head of his Duplie on Mars.

He got to his feet a little shakily and found that he was all right, except for the ache in the back of his head and the dustiness of his clothes. He said, "I'm all right, thanks."

"You're sure? You're sure you don't want—?"

"I'm sure," Anders said. "Thanks a lot, but I'm sure. I've got only a block to go, and I'll report this to the police from there." He knew it would seem strange to the little clerk if he didn't intend to report it.

He got his hat and briefcase and started off, a bit waveringly at first, but more firmly after he'd gone a few steps. After one try at putting the hat back on his head, he carried it in his hand. His head would be too sore for days to let him wear a hat. He grinned wryly as it came to him that his duplicate on Mars would have an equivalently sore head; the blow of the blackjack had fallen before the duplication.

HE WAS less than fifteen minutes late when he arrived at Ambassador Pearson's residence. He stopped outside the door long enough to brush most of the dust from his clothes and then rang the bell.

Pearson himself came to open the door. He looked blankly until Anders said, "Matt Anders, Mr. Amba-

sador. Please overlook the disguise—at least until I have a chance to remove it."

"Anders! But—" Pearson looked down at Anders' clothes. "—what on earth happened? Did you have an accident?" His eyes widened. "Or are you Matt Anders? That disguise—"

Anders grinned. "Is a good one. But if you'll suspend disbelief long enough to give me access to a lavatory for a few minutes, I think you'll recognize me. And after that I'll tell you what happened."

"Certainly. And while you're there, can I make you a drink? You look as though you could use one. Something Venusian, or—?"

"Whiskey," Anders said. "A big slug of it, straight, wouldn't hurt me a bit."

Pearson showed him a door. "That room will do. And your drink will be waiting, Matt."

In the lavatory, it took only a few minutes to remove the thin rubber mask, backed by sponge rubber in places, to change the shape of his features and to remove the gray wig that had helped cut down the force of the blackjack blow. There was a clothes brush and it removed the rest of the street dirt from his coat and trousers.

He looked at himself in the glass, and the face that looked back at him was a familiar one. A thin, angular face—vaguely Mephistophelean. Very Mephistophelean in the many caricatures of him that had been in the newspapers of three planets.

Not a popular face, even among people of his own planet. The face of a man reputed to wield too much power and to wield it ruthlessly—and a man whose face, particularly in caricature, looked the part. But a handsome face, an interesting one. A face all too easy to remember, which was why he wore such careful disguises

when he traveled alone. How had the Duplies penetrated that disguise? His best friend—and that was probably President Morphy—couldn't have done so.

His drink, and a comfortable chair, were waiting for him when he rejoined Pearson. He sank into the chair and drank deeply and appreciatively. Then he put down his glass and said, "Mr. Ambassador, I believe I've learned the secret of the disasters we've had recently. I believe I know how the Duplies have been getting their information."

He frowned. "And it's about time—if it isn't too late. It shouldn't be any secret that our morale has been on the skids for months. At this rate, in spite of the fact that we control space and have the Duplies pretty solidly blockaded, we'll lose the war due to apathy on Earth. Corruption, bribery, inability—let's face it—among our top military leaders. Our munitions industry breaking down—from the top. Our diplomats losing point in negotiations with Venus to come in on our side."

The ambassador winced at the last sentence. "That's rather a blow under the belt, isn't it, Matt? I've done my best."

"Sure. But you're bucking espionage beyond anything you've ever dreamed of. That's what I found out today. Mars knows already every detail of the information and instructions I've brought you—and I haven't even turned them over to you yet."

"Good God, Matt. Are you sure? How?"

Anders told him, briefly, the experience he'd just had—and wasn't supposed to remember.

Pearson's face was a pattern of dismay when he'd finished. He thought and then asked, "But why didn't they kill you? I don't understand that. Duplicated on Mars or not, you're

still a valuable man to Earth."

"Two reasons, Sir. First, the information they'll get from my duplicate will be more valuable to them if, as they think, we don't know they have it. If I disappeared, or were found dead under whatever circumstances, there'd be at least a suspicion that they had the information I was carrying—a copy of it, even though the original was still in my brief case. Second, what if they plan, later, to get my Duplie to Earth through the blockade—and they do get ships through it, either way—and then have me killed under circumstances where he can step into my shoes." He leaned forward earnestly. "And if that's happened already to some of our top men, it explains a lot. A hell of a lot."

"But if that's true—"

There was a knock on the door, a soft tap.

Pearson frowned. "Must be my daughter. Well—I won't let her interrupt us long." He raised his voice. "Come in."

THE DOOR opened and the girl who came through it was, Matt Anders thought, possibly the most striking girl he'd ever seen. There was something about the way she held herself, the way she walked.... He remembered now having heard that Ambassador Pearson had a great grandparent who had been a full-blooded Sioux; it was obvious in his daughter. Her cheekbones were high, her complexion dark, her hair raven black and worn in braids across the top of her head. Tall, lithe, full-breasted, calm-eyed, she carried herself with the pride and dignity of the plains Indian. And although she was young—possibly ten years Anders' junior—she had the poise and assurance of a woman who has been conscious of her beauty for years.

Matt Anders was on his feet before

Pearson's murmured introduction. He swallowed, and immediately felt ridiculous at the reaction. But almost all the women he'd ever met had seemed weak and insipid to him. Marta Pearson was something else again. She was almost an atavism; she was as different from the modern woman of the twenty-second century as a tiger from its descendent, a tabby cat. And maybe that accounted, Anders thought, for his reaction. He had often suspected that he himself, emotionally, belonged in a different and earlier century.

She smiled distantly in acknowledgment of the introduction, but her smile didn't reach beyond her lips as she held out a cool hand to him. And her words were to her father. "I recognized Matt Anders immediately, Father. After all, one can hardly look at a periodical or tune in a visor without seeing the features of the famous alter ego of President Morphy. His *hatchetman*, I believe, is the commoner term."

Her father said sharply, "Marta!"

Matt Anders felt himself flush, the first time he'd done so, to his own recollection, since adolescence. But he made his voice calm. "It isn't always easy to serve your planet in the way your superiors direct, Miss Pearson. Especially when your position isn't an elective one from which you can be removed for unpopularity." He hesitated for a moment, then decided to continue: "Hasn't it occurred to you that, disliked as I am, President Morphy is the most respected and loved person on Earth? But if there wasn't a Matt Anders, a hatchetman, to do certain things for him, perhaps he could not even be re-elected. Right now, he's just about all that's holding Earth together and keeping the anti-war faction from letting the Duplies have their way on Mars."

He wondered, even as he talked, why he was bothering to justify him-

self. He was used to being hated by millions. Why worry about one more—except that the one more was suddenly important to him?

Marta Pearson still smiled coolly. "A convincing little speech, Mr. Anders. Unfortunately, it seems difficult for me to forget that it was you who ordered the Third Fleet to take the Martian base on Calypso at all costs. And 'all costs' turned out to be the loss of three-fourths of the fleet. Oh, they took Calypso, yes. But where were you at the time, Mr. Anders?"

She had touched a raw spot. He paled, angry at her, angrier at himself for allowing her to put him on the defensive like this. "I was on Luna, Miss Pearson, when the Third Fleet left there on its mission. I did not accompany it, on strict and specific orders from President Morphy. He, not I, thought I was too valuable to risk, especially since I have no training in space combat and would have been of no special value to the fleet."

HER SMILE was openly sardonic now. "Yet you ordered them—and don't deny it was your order—to take Calypso at all costs. And they were obliged to obey that order even when it was found the satellite's defenses were far stronger than had been guessed."

"Marta!" her father said again.

"And they took it," she went on. "With losses of three ships out of four. My brother was on one of the ships that didn't make it; my fiancé on another."

She turned and walked from the room.

"I'm sorry, Matt," Pearson said. "I don't know what I can say or do...."

Anders grinned wryly. "You might get me another drink, Mr. Ambassador. If she'd waited, I could have told her my own brother happened to

be with that fleet—and didn't come back."

"That I can tell her—and will, Matt. And I wish top secrecy didn't prevent my telling even my own daughter the reason that order was necessary, and would have been justified, even if it had meant complete loss of several fleets."

Matt Anders took the glass Pearson held out to him. "You know that?"

"Yes. Uranium on Calypso. None on Mars. Which is why that base was of vital importance to the Duplies—and why it was equally vital to us to keep them away from it. If they once get quantities of uranium..."

Anders nodded gloomily. "If they do, then the war is no longer in space only. We'll have to destroy their cities to keep them from destroying ours—and it will end up with both being destroyed. As long as there's even a chance of the stalemate's continuing, anything would be better than that."

He flicked his hand in a characteristic gesture, brushing the subject aside. He downed his second drink before he picked up his brief case and took papers from the secret compartment which he handed to the ambassador. "Well, here's what I was to deliver to you, Sir, and now it's delivered. Only—and keep this between us—work on the certainty that the Duplies have this information, too. At least the general outlines of it. If I'd been able to memorize all the minor details and figures, of course, I wouldn't have carried the papers. But my Duplie will know all I knew about it—and that's enough to make it practically worthless."

Pearson looked puzzled. "But you said 'between us'. You mean you're not going to report what happened to you?"

"Not while I'm on Venus. I'm not to stay here long anyway. Just long

enough, in fact, to get a night's sleep tonight. I'll leave in the morning. And what I've learned through my own kidnaping and duplication is so important, I want to report it in person, direct to Morphy. I won't even trust the tightbeam; we're not sure the Duplies aren't tapping it."

"I see, Matt. Probably you're right. And I'm awfully sorry about Marta."

"It could have been worse. At least she didn't take a shot at me. And that's happened three times in three months back on Earth. Misguided people—and they weren't all Duplies, either—seemed to think killing me would solve all the problems of the solar system."

"Well—I'll talk to her before dinner. By the way, Matt, one thing I've wondered about. Not that it matters. Did you give that order to the Third Fleet? Or did you just transmit the President's order?"

"Oh, I gave it all right. It became a sudden emergency when we learned about the uranium angle on Calypso, and I couldn't reach Morphy immediately so I gave the order. Later, of course, he confirmed it. But the publicity went to my issuance of the order, not his confirmation of it." He shrugged. "Well, that's part of my job, to take the blame for nasty things off his shoulders. And that was a particularly nasty one from the outside—because we had to hold back, for security reasons, why Calypso was suddenly so vitally important."

Pearson nodded slowly. "I begin to see how tough a job you've got. Wish I could tell that to Marta. Suppose I can tell her that it was of vital importance, even if I don't tell her why. And that you lost your brother there, too."

Anders said, "Don't, please. It's part of my job to have people feel like that about me." But he knew, even as he said it, that he didn't want

Marta Pearson to feel that way. The girl attracted him as no woman ever had before.

THE AMBASSADOR cleared his throat. "Just the same, I'm going to talk to her. By the way, we dine early on Venus. If you wish, before dinner, to be shown to your room to bathe and...you didn't bring any luggage, so I presume you won't have to change—"

"The bath sounds good to me, but haven't you heard of washtex? I can wash these right under the shower with me and they'll dry, in the original folds, in three minutes. Luggage will be a thing of the past when these become common, unless one's taking a long enough trip to want variety in costume."

"Good. Then I'll show you to—"

"Wait, Mr. Ambassador. If we can spare a few minutes, I've just got an idea. Let me think it out a second, first."

Anders had stood up. Now, he sat down again in his chair, and the ambassador sat down again too. After a few seconds, Anders said, "I think it's a good idea. Listen, I know how we can put a crimp in whatever plans the Duplies may have for substituting my Duplie for me somewhere. They can't know how badly I was injured by that blackjack; they didn't have time to give me a medical examination. Suppose you put out a general story—give it to the newscast services—that, shortly after my arrival here, I died of a brain concussion. The Duplies will believe it."

"But—Good Lord, Matt—"

"Let me finish. You also send a tightbeam message to Morphy telling him that the newscast story is a phony; that I'll report to him as soon as possible and explain it. For him to arrange so I can land safely—in the same disguise and under the same name I used coming here—without

being shot as a Duplie of myself. The Duplies know that disguise, but if they think I'm dead they won't be watching for me."

"But you yourself said we're not absolutely sure they don't intercept our tightbeam. What if they do?"

Anders' hand flipped the possibility aside. "Nothing's certain. If they do intercept it, we've lost nothing. If they don't, we're a jump up on them." He grinned. "And we can always announce that the report of my death was exaggerated—much as that will disappoint many people. You'll do it?"

"Of course, Matt."

"Let's see—Earth time—Morphy won't be getting up for a couple of hours yet. Get the telenews story out right away, if you will, but hold off until after dinner on the tightbeam correction; no use waking him up. His health's not been too good lately, and he's been working much too long hours."

Besides, he thought to himself, it wouldn't hurt Morphy to think for a few hours, if he got the telenews story first, that he'd lost himself a messenger boy. It might give him something to think about, before the secret correction came.

"If you want it that way, Matt—"

"I do. And now if I could go to my room—"

CHAPTER III

DEATH FOR A DUPLIE

HE STRIPPED and washed his clothes first, so they'd dry while he bathed himself. The bath felt wonderful, as did the few minutes he spent under the automatic masseur. By the time he was ready for it, his clothing was dry, unwrinkled, and looking as though it had just come

from the factory. Washtex—this was the first time he'd tried it—was going to be popular indeed. He looked at the comfortable clean-sheeted bed yearningly and wished he could spend a few hours in it.

He knew perfectly well that Pearson would excuse him from dinner if he explained how tired he was after the trip from Earth. But—all right, admit it, he told himself—you want to see Marta again no matter how tired you are, and no matter what her attitude toward you may be this time.

Refilling his pockets with the sundry things he'd taken from them before washing the suit, he hesitated as he picked up the electrogun which he always carried in an inside pocket. It was a neat and deadly little weapon, weighing only six ounces but packing the punch of an elephant gun and completely silent in its operation. He shrugged, checked the mechanism, and put it in his pocket.

He left his room and walked down the stairs, the neoplast soles of his shoes making no noise whatsoever. As he neared the door of the library where he'd had his previous talk with the ambassador, and his embarrassing encounter with Marta, he heard both of their voices raised a little, he thought, above ordinary conversational level. Undoubtedly they were discussing him; probably Marta was being reprimanded for the things she had said—and was arguing back.

Curiosity got the better of him. Snooping or not, he wanted too badly to hear what Marta had to say about him to worry, just at that moment, about gentlemanly instincts. He took a few steps neared the door; he could hear clearly now what was being said. If there was a break in the conversation or if either voice approached nearer the doorway, he could start walking quickly and avoid the ap-

pearance of having been standing there.

Marta seemed to be apologizing for the scene she had made. Matt Anders stood even more quietly; walking in now would be even more embarrassing than if he walked in on a quarrel.

AND THEN suddenly Marta's voice changed, became cold again. "But, Father, that isn't what I wanted to tell you. It is this: that information Matt Anders brought you—you mustn't present it at the conference tomorrow."

"I don't know what you're talking about, Marta. I can see, of course, how you could easily guess the reason for Matt's trip here. But why do you say—?"

"The Duplies have that information, yes. But hasn't it occurred to you that they won't have time, by tomorrow, to prepare a suitable rebuttal? That we can't let you present it?"

"I don't—what are you saying, Marta?"

"It's quite simple, Father. I mean—this."

Matt Anders had been slower than usual. He should have got it, four sentences ago. He moved swiftly now to the doorway, and his electrogun was in his hand when he got there. Too late—just in time to see the purple arc of the electrogun in the hand of the Duplie of Marta Pearson leap from its muzzle to the chest of the ambassador. His own electrogun fired in almost the same instant.

He stepped quickly into the room, pulling the door shut behind him. There had been two thuds of falling bodies, but he doubted that the sound would have been heard in whatever quarter of the house servants were preparing dinner. Houses on Venus are made of thick concrete, and the

sound of a jar does not carry easily even into the next room.

They were both dead, of course; he didn't have to verify that. An electrogun discharge doesn't mark a body, but, no matter where it strikes, even a toe or finger, it is fully as deadly as a direct hit from a heavy space cannon.

His lips thinned back over his teeth as he stared down at the beautiful body that had been a Duplie of Marta Pearson. Had she been a Duplie that afternoon when he had first met her? Well, it didn't matter now.

But one thing did matter—and vitally. Had Pearson, before the start of the conversation with what he thought was his daughter, given out the news of Anders' death from brain concussion? If so, Anders was in a hell of a spot. Pearson was the only person who could send a convincing tightbeam message to Earth to contradict that report, and Pearson was dead. He didn't even know where Pearson's tightbeam transmitter was; it would be carefully concealed somewhere and would take hours, probably, to find. And he didn't have hours; the servants who were preparing dinner would be announcing it soon.

And here he was with two dead bodies on his hands—and nothing about Marta's body that would prove it was a Duplie of her instead of the original. And if his own death had already been announced, he was the one who would be taken for a Duplie and shot on sight by the Venusian police. Despite the fact that Venus maintained neutrality in the Earth-Mars war, they knew the character of Duplies and hated them as much as Earthmen did. No Duplies were tolerated on Venus; the members of the Martian consulate had to prove their origin and birth—had to be dupes of the Duplies, not Duplies

themselves.

And damn vacillating Venus for that, for refusing to take active part in a war against inhuman things whom they recognized to be utterly evil.

But no time to think about that now. He'd have to act, and quickly. His eyes cast about and found the telenews set on a stand in the corner. He snapped it on, manipulated the dial until he found a station just starting on a news program.

A report or two on the war—news he already knew and to which he listened impatiently. Then: "It was announced half an hour ago by Terrestrial Ambassador Pearson that Matt Anders, personal aide to President Morphy of Earth, died this afternoon as a result of—"

He snapped it off; he didn't need to hear the rest. And Pearson would not yet have sent the tightbeam message of contradiction. He'd promised to wait until after dinner for that, and Pearson was a man of his word even in tiny things.

He went to the door and locked it; that would give him seconds of extra time if a servant came to announce dinner. Quickly, he dragged the two bodies out of sight behind a sofa; that would give him seconds more and a chance to talk his way out if he had to unlock the door.

He sat down in a chair to think.

It was fatal to stay on Venus. It would be fatal to go to Earth.

Suddenly he laughed. There was still Mars.

And why not? If he could get through the blockade—and others had done it—

I've got a Duplie on Mars, he thought viciously. He intended to replace me, if he could. Now the Duplies think I'm dead. *What if I can replace him?*

IT SOUNDED like a chance in a thousand. Maybe a million. Or maybe only a hundred, since the advantage of surprise would be completely in his favor, with the Duplies not even suspecting what he intended, since they would think—along with Earth and Venus—that Matt Anders was a dead duck.

Suddenly he was almost glad that tightbeam contradiction hadn't been sent.

Suddenly he was free.

Morphy, he thought, you've lost yourself a messenger boy.

How many minutes did he have? Enough to get back into his disguise as an elderly merchant of precious stones? He had to have enough minutes; otherwise he couldn't get his Spacezephyr at the spaceport.

He moved fast now. Telephone. The spaceport. His voice suddenly the voice of an old man. "Harvey Giles speaking. Owner of Spacezephyr SZ-1470. I learn I must return to Earth quickly; my son is seriously ill. Can you have the craft ready for me in ten minutes? Thank you. Thank you very much."

The bodies. A better job of concealment, so hidden that they wouldn't show unless someone deliberately looked under the sofa or over its back. Marta's body so beautiful. Damn Duplies. Was Marta alive somewhere? It was unlikely, almost impossible. Why would they have kept her alive after duplicating her? And after having her Duplie take her place. They'd kept him alive, but only because they had to wait until his Duplie had a chance to replace him. So forget Marta; she's dead. And luckily, her Duplie was dead now too.

He left the door of the library open behind him.

In his room, he jerked the brief case open, took out the disguise, the rubber mask and wig. He got them on, not too good a job but it would

pass casual inspection. Five minutes gone since he'd left the library. How many more before dinner? And for how many minutes thereafter would the servants look around the house before they called the police, or found the bodies and then called the police?

Down the stairs and his luck held. Outside, into the early evening. A landcab was going by and he hailed it. He'd take his chances on its being what it seemed; but his hand was on the butt of his electrogun as he got into it, and stayed there until it let him off at the spaceport.

The usual brief formalities, the casual glance at his identification and at himself. On Earth it would have been stricter. But then Earth was at war, and Venus wasn't.

His ship was ready, waiting.

Blastoff.

Straight up, of course, first; and when he moved the gyroturn handle, he turned the little ship toward Earth. Probably there'd be a routine radar check to see that he took the course he'd said he was taking; interceptors notified to challenge him if he didn't. Besides, eight or ten hours' travel toward Earth would lose him only an hour or two. Luckily, Mars was in the same general direction across the ecliptic.

Luckily, too, he had benephrin tablets to keep him awake for the fifty-hour trip to Mars. One can't afford to doze on a one-man craft in space, which turned out to be far more crowded with meteors and planetoids than Earth-bound man had ever guessed. When he hit Mars, he'd need at least twenty-four hours' sleep under another drug to counteract the benephrin binge, but he'd worry about that when he got there.

Forty-five hours later and a million miles out from Mars, he came to the blockade patrol. His receiver barked, "Identify yourself immediate-

ly or we open fire!"

THE WAR between Earth and Mars was a peculiar war. Earth could have destroyed Mars at any time—but didn't. Earth had atomic bombs; the hundred cities of Mars which housed almost a billion people could have been wiped out within a week. But those billion people were colonists from Earth, friends and relatives of almost every family on Earth.

The Duplies, of course, knew this emotional appeal and counted on it. They also pointed, propaganda-wise, to the fact that they had made no attack on the cities of Earth and did not intend to. Of course they did not intend to—without uranium to make bombs. Mars itself had no uranium, no fissionable matter of any kind. And it was fortunate for Earth that the Kingston Duplicator exploded on any attempt to duplicate a fissionable substance, else all the Duplies would have needed was one small piece of uranium which they could have duplicated endlessly, until they had enough to blow Earth out of the solar system. And no sense of morality to keep them from doing just that.

So the war had been in space, where Earth had the edge and had a blockade around Mars—although Martian blockade runners frequently got through it. And the war, unknown to the citizens, was also a war on Earth—a war of espionage, propaganda, sabotage of morale, conducted by a few well-placed Duplies.

And Martian propaganda didn't sound unreasonable, for it claimed it wanted only to be left alone. It would have been all too reasonable, except that the billion people of Mars were the dupes of the Duplies, under their absolute control.

Propagandizing the true Martian colonists about the real nature of the

Duplies would have been the answer, but the Duplies controlled channels of communication. All Martian radios and televisors were tight-tuned to the big broadcasting station of Marsport; they could receive no messages from Earth or from ships in space. The Martians were completely shut off from the rest of the system—and had no choice but to believe the propaganda their leaders fed them. And their leaders were Duplies. The Martians thought they were fighting a War of Independence against Earth; they didn't even know that their independence had already been granted and that they were already a free planet and no longer a colony.

MATT ANDERS continued his course. The next challenge came only seconds later: "Identify yourself immediately or we fire."

He couldn't safely ignore that one. He pressed the two-way visiplat button so the flagship which had done the challenging was in visual as well as auditory communication. Lieutenant-Commander Gresham's heavy-joweled face appeared on the screen in the little Spacezephyr. Anders knew that, in the flagship, Gresham was seeing Anders' face with the disguise long since removed.

Anders said crisply, "You know me, Gresham. Confidential mission, highly important." If he could stall a few more seconds, he'd be through. Right now they probably couldn't fire at him because he was among them; thirty seconds more and he'd be out of range past them—if his bluff worked. If he could only make Gresham hesitate. If Gresham only hadn't heard the news that—

Gresham hesitated. His mouth opened a little, snapped shut, then opened again and he said, "But you're—"

He didn't finish, but Matt Anders

knew that Gresham had heard the news Ambassador Pearson had given out to the newscasters.

Two more seconds passed, and then Anders knew that he was safe, for Gresham still stared at him. Then Gresham said, "But, Anders, we received no orders on this. I'm afraid I must ask you to report to me on the flagship for clearance."

And that had killed another dozen seconds. Gresham was stalling, letting him through. Gresham was a Duplie. Which accounted for the relative ease with which blockade runners had been getting through. Now Gresham, having heard of his "death" on Venus, thought that he was one.

Dead-pan, Anders helped with the stalling. "Afraid, Commander, that's impossible. Direct orders from President Morphy. Suggest you check with him." Gresham would check with him all right—to keep his own nose clean—but even if he got Morphy at once, enough minutes would have been wasted.

He was out of range now, already, and with a sigh of relief he clicked off the screen. He'd never thought, before, that he'd be glad to find out any highly placed Earth officer was a Duplie. If Gresham hadn't been one he still might have bluffed his way through, but it would have been much tougher going.

He landed the Spacezephyr in a high valley between Martian mountains, about eighty miles from the main city of Marsport. A relatively safe place to land the craft and to leave it; the valley was above the level of breathable atmosphere, so no Martian would come there for any ordinary reason. Anders would have to wear an oxygen mask to get down to breathable air, but the Spacezephyr carried one. His only danger of being spotted was from above, and he'd

have to chance that.

He needed sleep; almost a hundred hours without it, even with benephrin to keep him going, had sapped his stamina so much that his physical and mental reactions were sluggish and he couldn't have walked half a mile, even under Martin gravity, without keeling over. He needed at least twenty-four hours of sleep under the drug that was the counteractant to the benephrin. Here, before he left the little spaceship, in a spot no Martian would come to, was the best place to get it. He took the counter-drug, made himself as comfortable as he could, and was asleep in less than a minute.

HE SLEPT longer than he'd intended, almost thirty hours. And when he awoke it was night. Deimos and Phobos, the two moons of Mars, were in the sky, but gave little light. He'd have to use a handflash and, once he was in sight of the road over the top of the mountain, he would be conspicuous. He decided to wait until daylight for his trip over and down the mountain to the nearest road.

He waited until dawn before he left the Spacezephyr. The range he had to scale, up one side and down the other, would have been a day's work on Earth; on Mars, at .38 Earth gravity, he weighed less than sixty pounds so it was easy, if sometimes risky, climbing. He was over and down before the Martian noon. As soon as he was low enough for the air to be breathable, he hid his oxygen mask carefully in a place where he could find it again in case he lived long enough ever to want to make his way back to the spacecraft. Then he walked to the nearest road. He stood along the edge, waiting.

Luckily, it was a road used not too frequently. Landcars whizzed by at intervals of five or ten minutes, just about right for his purpose. He waited

until a gray military one came along, with no other car in sight in either direction. He stood still until it was just past him, then drew his electrogun and fired at it. A purple flash darted from the muzzle of the gun to the speeding car. Possibly at that distance, and diffused by the body of the landcar, the shock of the bolt may not have been lethal. But it was enough of a shock to the driver to make him lose control. The car swerved, tires screamed. The car tipped, then rolled. Anders ran toward it. When he got there, its occupant was dead, his head a gory mess against the broken driving column. He wore a captain's uniform—or what was left of one.

Anders waited by the wrecked vehicle, knowing that the next military car wouldn't pass without investigating this one. Civilians would; hands off anything remotely resembling military affairs were their strict orders on Mars.

Several civilian cars went by in the next twenty minutes, slowing down out of curiosity—but pretending not to slow down—and their occupants looking curiously at the wrecked car and at Matt Anders, waiting there so calmly. But none of them stopped.

Then the jackpot he'd been waiting for. A gray car that stopped, brakes squealing, just beyond the wreck, and backed up. And the man in it wore the insignia of a lieutenant general; he might even be a Duplie. The captain had probably been only a dupe, and Anders had been sorry about that. But what was one life when billions were at stake?

The lieutenant general got out of the gray landcar and walked over scowling. "What's this? And what are you doing here? Who are—?"

Matt Anders' shot from the electrogun got him. There was nothing to be

gained by conversation. He pulled open the door of the wrecked car and shoved the body of the lieutenant general through it. That would stall investigation a little; whoever found the wreck next would assume the two had been riding together, with the captain acting as chauffeur. A missing military landcar wouldn't be looked for at once.

Just the same he got into the other landcar as quickly as he could and got away from there fast. He drove twenty miles before he found a side road; he turned into it, and as soon as he was out of sight of the main road he stopped and looked through the documents compartment of the car. He found what he wanted most, a road map of the area and a city map of Marsport. He also found enough identification to tell him it was the car of Lieutenant General MacWheeler. The name MacWheeler was recalled to him as being one of the original batch of Duplies sent to Mars. MacWheeler's original on Earth, he remembered, had been an expert in rocket technology.

One Duplie less now.

HE STUDIED the maps thoroughly; memorizing, so he wouldn't have to stop on a main road or in traffic, the route to Marsport; the simplest route through it which would take him to the domes, the Duplie headquarters. Here, if anywhere, he'd find his own Duplie. Beyond that, he couldn't plan.

As he neared Duplie headquarters, the insignia on the landcar he drove—fortunately for him indicating only the rank of its owner, not his identity—proved its value. Sentries snapped to attention, gates were opened. He parked the landcar and left it, tried to act casual as he strolled toward the domes.

Earth espionage on Mars by no

means matched Martian—Duplie—espionage on Earth. He knew about the domes, but not much beyond the fact that they were Duplie headquarters, and that they were dozens of yards thick and proof against atomic bombing. Which meant that if Earth was ever forced to bomb Marsport they'd kill everyone except the Duplies, the only ones they'd want to kill.

There were half a dozen domes and he hadn't the slightest idea which one to head for. In which of them would new Duplies undergoing orientation and indoctrination be quartered?

He wasn't alone; there were other people on the walks to and around the various domes, and he started watching them, hoping for a clue. He'd have to keep watching until he got one. It could be a fatal error to try to enter the wrong dome, and all of them, he saw, were guarded by sentries at the single door of each.

He watched the people around him, studying them as carefully as he could without appearing to do so. Some of them, particularly those in uniform wearing high rank, were undoubtedly Duplies. The others were undoubtedly ordinary Martians, but those sufficiently indoctrinated by Duplie propaganda to be trusted by them beyond all doubt. Most of these were in civilian clothes. A few had Washtex suits like his own, a fact that encouraged him.

The number of women, in uniform or otherwise, surprised him. And some of them, he noticed, were dressed very seductively. Were they Duplie women—who would be, as were Duplie men, completely amoral? There had been fewer than a hundred women among the original three hundred and twenty first duplicated for Mars. But perhaps the Duplies had been willing to extend their quota when it came to acquiring women for themselves, women as amoral as they. He toyed with the

thought, and a moment later was sure of it. He recognized one of the women—one of the scantily dressed ones—as Mona Wayne, the most beautiful telestar of Earth. Mona Wayne's Duplie, rather; and certainly she hadn't been duplicated to Mars because of her value in espionage.

Valuable in other ways, indubitably, although he himself preferred— He jerked his mind away from thinking about Marta Pearson. He'd thought about her plenty in those fifty-odd hours in space en route to Mars. But there'd been time enough to think then. Now, he had to concentrate on finding his own Duplie.

He tried to pull his mind away from the thought of her—and just then he saw her.

Or her Duplie. Another Duplie of her? It must be, because it was inconceivable that the original, the real Marta Pearson would have been brought to Mars. There was no reason for it, everything against it. Besides, she was dressed—one might even say undressed—in the fashion of the Duplie women. And the fashion became her; she had the body for it. Had she been duplicated for the same purpose for which Mona Wayne, the telestar, had undoubtedly been duplicated? He almost ground his teeth at the thought, and then remembered that this was a Duplie. He'd killed one Duplie of her just after it had killed her father; he could kill this one as readily.

Then they were abreast and she caught his eye. She said, "Hi, Matt," so casually that it startled him—until he remembered that there was a Duplie Matt Anders here, and she undoubtedly knew him and thought she was speaking to him. And that she took his presence so casually for granted proved that his Duplie really was here, and that he was close to his target.

He managed to wave and speak in

reply with equal casualness, and forced himself to go to the next crosswalk without looking around. Only then did he turn and look back, lighting a cigarette to cover his standing there, and he let his eyes follow after her until she entered a dome.

He waited a few more minutes and then walked toward the dome into which she had entered.

CHAPTER IV

TWO'S A CROWD

TWO COLD-EYED guards stood, one on either side of the door. As he walked toward it, one—the one with sergeant's insignia—stepped forward and barred his way. He said, "The password, Sir." Courteously, but firmly.

Anders scowled and continued to advance up to the point where another step would have meant body contact with the man barring his way. He said, irritably, "Bother the password. I've forgotten it. You know me."

The guard stepped quickly back and there was an electrogun suddenly in his hand; one appeared also in the hand of the other guard. The first one said, "Our orders are to challenge three times. If the password is not forthcoming, we're to shoot."

The other one said, "That's right, Mr. Anders. Sorry, but this is the second challenge. The password, please."

Matt Anders knew he couldn't get his own gun out in time; he was just deciding the only possible course was to turn and stride away in simulated anger, hoping that they wouldn't shoot him in the back if he didn't wait for the third challenge.

A hand dropped on his shoulder. A voice said, "What's the matter, Matt?"

He turned his head, deciding in a split second that he wouldn't be sur-

prised whoever stood there; the voice had been familiar although he couldn't place it. Sean Charlton, head of the W. B. I., the World Investigation Bureau, top man in counterespionage.

Despite his decision, for a second Anders' mind reeled. If Charlton, of all Terrestrials, was a Duplie... And then he realized that Charlton wasn't Charlton, the real Charlton, had been duplicated somehow and this was his Duplie. But the substitution still hadn't been made or the Duplie wouldn't be here; Charlton's Duplie must still be in the indoctrination period, as was his own.

He said, "I've forgotten the damn password, Sean."

Charlton laughed. He leaned forward and whispered in Anders' ear. Anders said, "Thanks, Sean." To the guards he said, "Hiroshima."

The nearest guard frowned. "That's irregular. He told you."

Anders grinned. "Nuts, Sergeant. You didn't hear him tell me; you're just guessing. Besides, it's okay—I just couldn't remember whether it was Hiroshima or Nagasaki, and I was afraid if I said the wrong one you'd shoot, so I was stalling. Now I just remembered which of the two it was."

It must have sounded reasonable; the sergeant shrugged. He stepped back and holstered his gun; the other guard holstered his.

Charlton's Duplie and Anders entered the dome side by side. The Duplie said, "Lucky Matt, lucky again that I came along just then. Lucky enough to be the last of the Duplies."

The last of the Duplies! What on three planets did Charlton mean by that?

HE DIDN'T dare ask, but he'd have to find out. They were walking past a building directory of the dome; Anders glanced at it out of the corner of his eye and tried to

find his own name among the A's. He saw it, but they were walking too fast for him to catch the room number that followed it. Anyway, he did have a room here; he'd learned that much. And probably his Duplie was in it right now. Possibly with the Duplie of Marta Pearson? Had she been coming here, by any chance, to see him? It was possible, but only a possibility; as a relatively new Duplie she probably had quarters here too.

Anyway, he didn't want to go to his room right away now; first he wanted to find out, if he could, what Charlton had meant by that "last of the Duplies" business.

He said, "Let's go to your room, Sean. Like to talk a while."

"Okay, and we'll have a drink."

When they entered the elevator Anders saw that there were buttons for eight floors; the top few would be small in area because of the dome shape of the building. Charlton pressed the button for the fourth floor.

Charlton made drinks for them when they were in the room. "Ran into your friend Marta just outside the Communications Dome," he said. "Having trouble with her? She sure acts different since she got back this morning."

Anders wanted to ask where she got back from, but he couldn't risk questions to which he was probably supposed to know the answers—especially not after Charlton had given him the password he'd "forgotten." The Duplie might put two things together and come up with the right answer. He said casually, "Yeah, she does seem a little different. Don't know why."

"Guess it's a tough trip on the blockade runners. Don't worry; she'll be all right when she's rested up. Well, a break for you things got fouled up there."

"I didn't get the details on that," Anders said. "Did you?"

"Not except that a wheel came off somewhere; she had to kill her original along with the old man, so she couldn't substitute. No chance to get rid of the body in time. So they brought her back."

A pulse was throbbing in Matt Anders' temple. He knew the Marta Pearson he'd killed was a Duplie. And this Marta, the one he'd seen enter the dome, had just arrived here, this morning, on a blockade runner—not via duplication. Could it possibly be—

Charlton was saying, "Drink up, I'll make us another." He took Anders' glass. "Yes, you're a lucky guy, Matt. The last Duplie."

How could he fish for information about that, without asking? If the Duplies were stopping duplication of humans, stopping it completely, it meant something important, damned important. A change in plans? A showdown?

"Quite a plan, huh?" he said.

Charlton came back with the glass. "It can't miss. They won't even be able to strike back, from Earth. Oh, the blockade fleet is probably carrying a few atomic bombs, but Gresham's in charge of the fleet—and, if nobody's mentioned it to you, he's one of us. If he can get away with it, he'll surrender without dropping a bomb, once Earth is kaput. If he can't—well, the fleet hasn't enough stuff to do more than ten per cent damage to us, as against ninety-five per cent to Earth." He laughed. "There isn't a town of less than five thousand there that hasn't got a Duplicator! And dozens of them in every big city. Imagine an A-bomb going off simultaneously in every Duplicator on Earth. What a bang that'll be. And enough radioactivity in the air to kill off everything that's

left. That's the only bug in the plan: that it'll be so many years before we can take over Earth. That radioactivity'll last a long time."

Anders stretched his lips over his teeth in what he hoped was a grin. The Duplies—probably the Duplie of Kingston himself—had figured some change in the transmitter end of the Kingston Duplicator that enabled an A-bomb to be sent from a transmitter without exploding. And if it exploded in the receiving end—well, that was what they wanted it to do anyway.

AND THAT would be the end of Earth. And what could he do here alone? Was there any way he could get more details without arousing—The hell with that, he thought suddenly. What did it matter if he aroused Charlton's suspicion, here alone with him in his room? Why not take the short cut? It meant he'd have to kill Charlton, but that would be a pleasure—next only to killing his own Duplie. Duplies weren't people.

He finished his drink and put the glass down carefully. Then suddenly the electrogun was in his hand, aimed at the Duplie. Anders said quietly, "Don't move."

Charlton didn't move, except that his eyes widened. He said, "What—" And then, in a different voice, "I get it. And I gave you the password."

"And now you're going to give me information. I haven't got time to fish for it. Give me the rest of the details of that plan."

"If I tell you, you'll kill me anyway."

"Maybe I won't. Maybe I'll knock you out and tie you up. I'll decide that later. But if you don't talk, I'll kill you right now. Want to talk?"

Charlton licked his lips. He said, "All right, you won't be able to do anything about it anyway. What do

you want to know?"

"When?"

"Tonight, pal. Tonight. It's almost ready to go now. You won't be able to do a thing about it."

"How did Kingston—or whoever it was—fix the transmitters to send atomics?"

"I'm no technician. I don't know that. But I know they can do it—have done it. Where do you think we got the uranium? About a pound of it is all we got off Calypso before you got our base there. But Kingston and his gang got the bug out of his apparatus. There's an attachment they put on a machine that lets it transmit or receive radioactives. Touchy to operate, but it works. They duplicated that pound of uranium into enough for three juicy bombs. And they've got three transmitters, each being adjusted to duplicate simultaneously in all the Kingston Duplicators on Earth. They're setting the patterns now. Can I have a drink?"

Anders nodded; he wanted time to think what else to ask. He looked for flaws in what the Duplie had just told him—and watched carefully meanwhile as Charlton poured himself a straight drink and downed it quickly.

Anders said, "This isn't all of a sudden. Something like that takes time. And it eliminates need for espionage. So why, only a few days ago, did you Duplies take me on Venus? With a deal like that coming up, what's Matt Anders to you?"

"Three answers to that. One, although we've been working on this for months, final tests weren't positive until yesterday. Two, we've been keeping on with all espionage activities for the sweet reason that if we stopped them suddenly, something might be missed; we just carried on with all previous plans. Three, and this is in your particular case only, the Chief

wanted a Duplie of you—to serve him on Mars as you've been serving Morphy on Earth. You were to be—I mean, your Duplie was to be—*his* hatchetman. He isn't going to substitute for you: he's going to stay here and help hold Mars in line."

Anders swore. It made sense, all three reasons made sense. And explained a lot of things.

"Where are the three Duplicators that are going to send the bombs to Earth?"

"I don't know."

Anders raised the muzzle of the gun slightly.

CHARLTON said quickly, "I don't know, I tell you. Nobody knows, except a few of us assigned to operate them. And you know I wouldn't be one of them, not knowing one end of a duplicator from the other. You know I'm no technician."

He was right on that, but—maybe he was still lying.

Charlton said, "Listen, use your head. That information would be top secret—just in case of something like this happening. Why should anyone be told where the machines are? I doubt if anyone, from the Chief on down, knows where all three of them are located. They're in different places, hundreds of miles apart. Just in case there's a spy among us—as there damn well is, I just found out—so he can't possibly get a message to the blockade fleet and have those machines bombed before they're ready to go."

It made sense. Duplie sense. With three machines, widely separated, any one of them sufficient, with one A-bomb apiece, to be duplicated endlessly. And that was why Charlton had talked so readily, knowing he couldn't possibly give the final and most vital piece of information under any pressure.

Anders stood. Should he take time to knock out and tie up the Duplie? Or simply—

Charlton stood, too; he was a little drunk. He must have been drinking heavily before Matt had met him, or he would not have been so affected by the few drinks he'd had now, even though the last had been a long, straight one.

He said, "All right, Matt. It was a good gag; pays me off for the one I pulled on you yesterday. And I went along with it for you. Now, let's shake hands on it, huh?" He took a step forward, his hand out, and then the step turned into a sudden dive to get in under the gun—too late. The gun flashed, caught him on top of his head at one-foot range. He'd saved Matt Anders' deciding what to do with him, and in a way that met Anders' fullest approval.

Anders went out quickly and back to the elevator. At the first floor, this time alone, he stopped to look at the directory. He picked his own name again and this time the room number too, 518. Marta Pearson, 310.

He punched the elevator bell for the third floor of the dome. He knocked on the door of 310.

He stepped in quickly as Marta opened the door, forcing her to take a backward step to avoid being run into.

He had to find out right away, and there was a short cut—crude though it would be. As he closed the door behind him he grinned at her and asked a question, a question that was deliberately so worded that only a harlot or a Duplie woman could fail to resent it. Color rose into Marta's face and her hand lashed out at him.

He caught the hand. He said, "Sorry, I had to do that. I apologize. But *you're no Duplie*. A Duplie woman wouldn't have blushed—even at that."

She jerked her wrist from his grasp and backed away.

He said, "Marta, I'm no Duplie either. We've got to work together, and fast. Something's going to happen to Earth tonight. If we pool what we know about this place, there's just a chance we can stop it."

She was breathing hard, her eyes wide. "All right, you trapped me. I'm not a Duplie, but you are. And—"

HE HADN'T been watching her hands, and he hadn't guessed that a garment as brief as the one she was wearing could have a pocket that could hold an electrogun—even one as tiny as the one she pointed at him. Only half the size of his own six-ounce one, it was fully as deadly, although one that size held only a dozen charges.

He was careful not to move forward now. He said, "Marta, you've got to believe me. Too much depends on it. If I were a Duplie, why would I have said I wasn't?"

Her voice was cold now. "I don't know. How can you prove you aren't? I still don't believe you."

He thought rapidly. "Call Room 518. You'll find my Duplie there—I hope. Get him down here." He had business with his Duplie anyway.

"Wait. Turn around." She walked up behind him when he'd turned; she held the muzzle of the gun against his back while she reached around and found the electrogun in his pocket. Then she stepped back again. "All right, I'll give you that chance. Walk over into the corner where I can watch you while I call."

He walked to the corner before he turned. She was standing by the speaker-receiver in the wall near the door; she'd already pressed the button and he heard her give the room number. He heard his own voice say, "Anders

speaking," over the communicator.

"Marta Pearson. Could you come down to my room a moment?"

"Marta! Didn't know you were back. Sure I'll be down, but it'll be a few minutes. Making a report on Venus. I got to finish for the Chief, rush job. Be seeing you soon as I can get there."

She pushed the button again. But the gun hadn't wavered. She said, "All right, maybe Matt Anders had two Duplies. Or if there's only one, how do I know which—"

"You don't," he said. "But listen, time is valuable, and we've got a lot of notes to compare. I won't move and you've got a gun on me. But while we're waiting save some time by telling me what happened to you on Venus. Was it you who gave me a bad time about that Calypso battle—or was that your Duplie, whom I killed later just after she'd killed your father."

"That was I. Wait, why should I tell you anything until I know you're not—"

"Because there's nothing to lose. You can always shoot me after you've told me. And it'll save time. Besides, even if you think I'm a Duplie, you've already told me you're not one, so what would more details matter?"

SHE THOUGHT that over a few seconds. "All right. It was I who told you off. Then—I went outdoors for a walk. I stayed away until it was time for dinner, because I didn't want an argument with Dad over what I'd said to you. I was a little late coming back and I came in the back way, because it was the nearest, from my direction. I went into the library and was surprised to see no one there. I started to light a cigarette and dropped my lighter; it was a round one and rolled under the sofa and—"

"You found the bodies."

"Yes. Of course I knew mine was—a Duplie. I guess I panicked; I was afraid and wanted out of there, didn't even want to stay long enough to use the communicator. There's a security station two blocks away and I guess I decided to run there for help. Anyway, I ran out the front door. And a landcab that had been parked across the street U-turned and pulled up the second I was out of the door and someone said, 'Get in!' There were two Duplies in the car—a man and a woman. I knew they'd shoot me down if I ran, even if I tried to get back in the house. So I got in the back seat. Suddenly my scare was over and I was calm. I think I know, incidentally, when they duplicated me. I had an accident three weeks ago; I was bowled over by a hit-and-run landcab—I thought—and knocked unconscious. They must have taken me to a Duplicator then, while I was out."

Anders said, "Then they must have sent your Duplie in just as an assassin, with no intent to substitute her for you. I don't get that; any assassin would have done."

"No. From things that were said later, they did intend to substitute. The car had been waiting in front to intercept me on my way back to the house. If I'd come back the front way, instead of the back, they'd have kidnaped me and killed me, and my Duplie would have stayed—and never have been suspected of killing Dad, of course. But—you say—you killed my Duplie. And I'd come back the wrong way, so things had gone wrong for them. They drove to where they'd left their ship, a blockade runner, and—well, we got here this morning. I'd managed to learn enough from them on the way here to—to get by until now."

"But why? I mean, didn't you try

to escape from them before you took off from Venus?"

"I don't know, I might have been able to." Her eyes blazed. "I didn't try. I thought that here I might—"

"You might kill a few Duplies before they killed you. My idea, too, more or less. But there's something bigger at stake, Marta. Something that—"

He suddenly stopped and put his fingers to his lips; he'd heard the faint sound of footsteps outside in the corridor. Then there was a knock on the door. Anders stepped back farther into the corner and stood very quietly.

Marta Pearson slipped the gun back into the pocket from which she'd taken it, but kept her hand on it; she stood, as she opened the door, so she could still keep at least a corner of her eye on Matt Anders.

Matt Anders' Duplie stepped in.

CHAPTER V

DECONTAMINATED VACATION

HE SAID, "Marta darling!" as he closed the door behind him. "Wonderful to have you back." And then stepped forward to embrace her.

But Marta stepped back away from him, even more quickly, and the gun came out of her pocket and up. "Look behind you," she said. "And don't move, outside of that."

The Duplie turned his head and saw Matt Anders. His eyes widened and despite the threat of the gun in Marta's hand his own hand went to the inside pocket of his coat and brought out the electrogun whose mate Marta had just taken from Anders. He said, "Marta! This is no Duplie—this is *my original*. I'm going to—"

He was going to, but he didn't. The gun in Marta Pearson's hand flashed first.

It had been a close thing; there was sweat on Anders' forehead as he stepped from where he'd been waiting in the corner. He said, "Sit down; we've got to talk fast, and then work fast—or try to. Listen, here's what I learned—from Sean Charlton's Duplie—since I got here." He told it quickly. "Can you confirm that—or add anything to it?"

Her voice was almost a whisper. "I—I guess it's right. I didn't know that much, but the few things I did hear fit into that story. That they now had three atomic bombs, and that something big is scheduled for tonight. That they had duplicators fixed so they could duplicate uranium. But I didn't know they could send the bombs to Earth and have them explode in— Oh, Matt, that's terrible."

He nodded grimly. "Anything else? Any details you can add?"

"Well—this, but I don't see how it helps. When human beings are sent through the Duplicators that are gadgeted to send uranium—they don't come out Duplies; the duplicates are human beings, too. Not amoral monsters."

"But how—? Why would that—?"

"They make this guess: in the human brain, in a certain part of it, there are submicroscopic particles of—of fissionable matter, just as there are minute quantities of so many other substances in the body. Too small to detect. And in duplicating a human being in an ordinary Kingston, those submicroscopic particles are exploded and injure a certain portion of the brain. The portion that houses—well, empathy, mercy, humanity—whatever you want to call the quality that makes people human instead of soulless monsters."

Anders nodded slowly. It seemed to explain something that had puzzled him—and everyone else, for that matter—for a long time. And it meant

that if ever again a situation arose in which it would be legitimate and advantageous to duplicate human beings, it could be done without creating monsters.

But—for now—the knowledge didn't seem to help.

"Marta," he said, "do you know anything about the setup here? Which domes are which among the others besides this one? Where headquarters is?"

SHE SHOOK her head slowly. "Except the Communications Dome—that's the small one, and I know they allow only Duplies in it and use only Duplies as the guards for it."

He leaned forward eagerly. "It's the source of the broadcasts that go out for Martians? The propaganda center from which they send all their programs for home consumption?"

"Yes. One of the two Duplies who brought me from Venus had worked there. He'd been a newscast announcer and—yes, that's where he broadcasts from. And I think it controls communications with Earth, too."

"Come on then. Let's go." He picked up his own electrogun where Marta had tossed it onto the bed and then picked up the duplicate of it which his Duplie had dropped.

"You mean—"

"Yes, let's take over communications. Maybe we can get a message through to Earth. At least we can talk to the Martians—the real Martians. And tell them what the real score is."

"Oh, Matt, do you think we can—"

Suddenly she was trembling, and he put his arms around her to steady her. Then their lips were together and her arms were around him. Suddenly she pushed him away; there were tears in her eyes but she was laughing.

"All right—Hatchetman," she said.

"Let's go. Business first—if we live through it."

"We'll live through it," he said, and wondered what the chances were. "Straighten your face. We're just taking a casual walk—till we get to the door of the Communications Dome."

They had the elevator to themselves. He asked, "How many Duplies will be in the building there? Any idea?"

"I've not been in it. At a guess, from what I heard, not over a dozen or so. It looks bigger from the outside than it really is. The walls of that one are nearly a hundred feet thick; it's the most bombproof of the lot, outside of headquarters."

They went along the walk to the smallest of the domes. The two guards at its door were in uniforms with high-ranking insignia, one a Colonel, the other a Major—both Duplies. No one else was near, and Matt Anders waited only until he was ten feet away, before there had been a challenge for the password. The hands of both rested on their weapons, but they hadn't drawn them—and never did. Anders' hand had entered his inner pocket with the deceptive casualness of one reaching for a cigarette—then the electrogun fired twice. The guards went down.

THEN MARTA and Anders were running through the door, along the long tunnel that led through the thick walls. The door at the inner end of the tunnel was a huge thing, beryllium steel and probably filled with lead to block radiation, eight feet thick. But it swung on its hinges lightly. "Keep your back to me. Watch," he told Marta as he swung it shut, dogged it down. He played his electrogun over the inner surface of it—the tremendous voltage should short any mechanisms in the door that would permit it to be opened

from the outside. Probably from the inside, too—in which case they were sealed in.

He turned back then. Marta's gun was flashing in her hand and he saw the figure of a Duplie who had stepped out of a doorway ahead suddenly fall.

"I don't think there's any alarm—yet," he whispered to her. "Kick off your shoes—I've got crepe rubber on mine—and here—" He handed her the other electrogun, larger than her own. "We've got some hunting to do."

The hunting took fifteen minutes. The interior of the dome, relative to its outside size, was tiny, less than a dozen rooms; they found and killed seven Duplies and the place was theirs.

The main control room. Anders pointed to the huge bank of condensers—similar to the one, relatively tiny, which he had seen operate the Kingston Duplicator on Venus. "Power!" he said. "We're self-contained. They can't shut us off the air!"

He found the microphone—a Duplie newscaster who had been using it lay dead in front of it. It had been in operation and the newscaster's use of it had ended in the middle of a sentence.

"Citizens of Mars," he said. "Citizens of Mars who are not Duplies, this is Matt Anders speaking to you, speaking for President Morphy of Earth. Listen, this is of vital importance—"

He told them the story simply, everything their own newscasts and sources of information had denied them since the start of the war—and before. He told them the plans of the Duplies to destroy all of Earth, in one blow, that very night. "...No, I don't know where the three Kingstons are being readied for sending atomic bombs. Some of you probably

do—that is, you know a new and ultra-powerful Duplicator has been set up and is being heavily guarded. Some of you know where another is, others will know the third. *Smash them* for the sake of Earth, your mother planet. Kill the Duplies and take over. I've told you what they really are, how they've fooled you. . . ."

And he told them again, and again. Not trying to be eloquent about it, just dishing out facts, straight facts that the Martian colonists had never been able to hear. Hammering those facts, over and over. Adding details, circumstantial details that would make them believable.

He was surrounded by panels of switches, but he didn't risk touching one. He knew that the mike into which he was talking was live and directed to all Martian private receivers—he didn't risk trying for more. Maybe he could have reached Earth with a message, maybe he could have reached the fleet and convinced them that their commander was a Duplie. But he didn't know one switch from another and didn't take a chance.

He talked, hammered facts. Maybe Earth or the blockade fleet would be monitoring the broadcast and get it anyway; if not, he wasn't going to take a chance on changing any settings. He talked to the people of Mars. Talked until he was hoarse, and then let Marta take over for a while, then talked himself hoarse again, repeating, hammering, arguing, pleading—

HED LOST all track of time when it happened—the thing he'd been hoping for, the thing that proved he was succeeding. There was a sound that was beyond sound, and the dome shook. He was knocked from his feet and so was Marta; he helped her up, his face shining with exultation, and was back at the mike.

"Thanks, citizens of Mars! I know now you're believing me, that you're doing something about it. The Duplies just dropped one of their three atomic bombs on the dome here. They'll drop the other two! They're losing Mars—now that you know the truth—and they've got to try to stop us. It's more important to them to hold Mars, right now, than to destroy Earth. While you're destroying them. You know who most of them are. If you miss a few, they can be hunted down later. There are only a few hundred of them, billions of you. You can—"

Again the dome shook. The second bomb. And they'd drop the third, too. They had to try; they had to see if three bombs in a row, in the same spot, would crack the defenses they themselves had made against atomic bombing. They couldn't let him keep talking to the people of Mars! The Duplies were realists; they'd know it would do them no good to destroy Earth, in revenge, if they were losing control over their own planet meanwhile. They had to stop him.

The third bomb, before he and Marta were on their feet from the impact of the second. Chunks of concrete fell near them, this time, but the dome held. And they'd won. The Duplies wouldn't have wasted one of the bombs on them unless his broadcast was going through; they wouldn't have spent all three of them unless their situation was desperate. The Martians were revolting against their Duplie masters.

But he didn't quit; there were obviously Martians who accepted the facts he'd been telling them, but maybe there were others who hadn't. The ones who had, since they'd acted so quickly, must already have suspected at least part of the truth despite the curtain of propaganda that had separated them from the outside, but the others— He went back to the mike;

he kept at it.

For more hours. Finally he said, "Marta, if that doesn't do it, it can't be done. Let's try to get something on what's going on. Anything around here that looks like a receiver to you? There must be other broadcasters, in other cities. If the colonists control them..."

He turned back to the mike and told what he was going to do. "I'll try to find a way to take an incoming message now." He found it.

"Anders, calling Matt Anders. If you hear me, pull over the mike and we can make it a two-way; I've still got you tuned in on a receiver."

"Anders speaking," he said into the mike. Marta was handling the receiver he'd found and tuned it loudly enough so he could hear. "I hear you. Come in. What's happening out there?"

"Revolt against the Duplies successful. Got all of them except some still holed up in the domes. Casualties light except in the dome area of Marsport; we were besieging the other domes when they dropped those bombs. But we've got cordons around the contaminated area; no Duplies will get out of there alive.

"Report from your blockade fleet; your broadcast was monitored there, heard by the Duplie of your commander as well as by others. He tried to order the fleet to add their bombs

to the communications dome you're in, but was stopped; he's under arrest on his flagship. The fact that he gave the order to bomb the dome your broadcast was coming from convinced his under-officers that he was, as you claimed, a Duplie. The fleet has landed, in peace, outside Marsport and is now helping us with mopping-up operations. There will be—there is—peace between Mars and Earth. Many of us had already suspected at least some of the things you told us about our own government. We rose quickly when we knew the truth. Are you hearing me okay?"

"I'm hearing you," Anders said. "I think we sealed ourselves in here. How soon can you get us out?"

"Don't even try to leave. There's food, water and liquor in the dome. The whole dome area—and especially, after three direct hits, your dome—is contaminated with radiation. We'll work at decontamination, but—I'm sorry about this—I'm afraid it'll be a week before it'll be safe to try to open the door of your dome, from either side."

Matt Anders grinned and turned to look at Marta Pearson. He said, "Don't let it worry you, don't even hurry. I think I've got a week's vacation coming—and I think I can find ways of spending the time."

THE END

PALOMAR BEGINS TO PERK!

By WALT CRAIN

"**W**AIT UNTIL the two-hundred-inch-er gets into action," the astronomers have been saying since the end of the war, "then you'll see something!" Everybody with an astronomical bent has been taking this optimistic remark with a grain or two of salt, because it has seemed as though nothing were ever going to trickle from the observatory housing the world's greatest telescope. The entire construction of the two-hundred-inch-er has been fraught

with trouble from the very beginning, trouble in casting the glass, building the mounting, and setting the completed instrument into action. But, for the last year or two, the gigantic astronomical eye has been in steady use, wresting secrets from the depths of space.

The first great announcement to come from Palomar reports that the telescope has detected the "red shift" in galaxies and nebulae three hundred and fifty million

miles away! This is startling and significant news, for the study of the red shift will undoubtedly reveal at last whether our universe is expanding or contracting.

The red shift is not a new phenomenon. The famed astronomer Hubble discovered the effect when he observed that spectral lines from stars and nebular systems were shifted toward the red end of the spectrum because the objects were receding from us. This red shift effect is comparable to the Doppler effect in sound and acoustics, in which a sound lowers in pitch when the object moves away. Light behaves in a similar manner and the cosmologists have had a field day with Hubble's discovery.

In order fully to appreciate its nature, however, the red shift had to be detected on systems more remote than those the one-hundred-inch at Mount Wilson was capable of showing. This the two-hundred-inch has accomplished, and already the cosmologists are rubbing their hands and chortling with glee as they prepare to

apply the knowledge to their theorization.

The direct and immediate effect of this study of the red shift is not apparent, but if ever the fundamentals of the universe are to be discovered they will come from two sources, the atomic physicists and the astronomers. The former have already done their part and now the astronomers are coming up with theirs!

The Einsteinian conception of a curved "bubble" universe, the different cosmologies of LeMaitre, the theorizing of Eddington, all depend upon adequate physical observation, and the large 'scope is the tool to provide this knowledge. Most amateur astronomers and s-f enthusiasts are eagerly awaiting the time when the instrument can be turned upon objects in the Solar System. Some interesting discoveries should be made here—some will maintain, indeed, that this latter sort of observation is more important—and with the lunar rocket just in the offing, who knows—they may be right!

THIS CAN KILL YOU!

By GLEN OTIS

MAN'S INTERFERENCE in the ecology of nature is nothing new. The way humans control natural pests and parasites ranging from insects to wolves is a familiar routine. For Man to come into equilibrium with his environment requires that he affect or change that environment. And this usually means that some natural life of some form gets out of hand. When that happens, he has to shift the balance the other way. How familiar is the story of the trouble people had with the mongoose when they imported it to rid West Indian islands of snakes!

Man has extended his ecological efforts to the rivers, the lakes, and the seas now. The operation fish hatcheries is standard practice the world over. A local restricted problem which may have much significance for the future is taking place around the Great Lakes region, and it shows the power of men to modify their ecological balances marvellously.

The deadly sea-lamprey, an eel with a razor-toothed mouth shaped like a suction disk, is one of nature's most predatory creatures. The sea lamprey attacks anything in the water, but it does so insidiously by fastening itself with its sucker-mouth to the creature and then slowly devouring. It has made its way into the Great Lakes, particularly Michigan, and from there has gone up the rivers of the surrounding states like Michigan and Wisconsin and Illinois, where it has proceeded to infiltrate into streams, rivers and lakes and to destroy commercially

valuable fish ranging from trout to whitefish and chub.

But science is taking a hand to select out and hunt down these incredibly voracious killers. The newest technique depends upon setting up under water at the mouths of rivers, electrical fences which give no warning. They do not affect the fish normally, because during the winter when the fences are on, the fish are not spawning. But when the sea lampreys come swimming into the river mouths all winter and at the spring, the fence neatly and effectively electrocutes them. The electrocution scheme is only one of many which involve everything from selective poisons to proposed "death-rays" of one sort or another.

Right now, an extensive acoustic-electronic program is under way to devise instrumentation suitable for use in the river mouths which will provide positive selection and destruction of the sea-lamprey. This is regarded as better and less risky than the use of some parasite to destroy the lamprey. Experience has shown that almost invariably the parasite becomes a greater nuisance than the pest it was imported to destroy.

The way men have upset the natural balances in ecology indicates that if we ever attain the planets, we had better be mighty sure that we neither bring back any parasites nor deposit any. We might have an impossible fire on our hands. Can you imagine what an invasion of Venusian *blugworms* would do to Mother Earth's natural checks and balances in nineteen ninety-two!



In this game for Earth's survival, it took a Queen to nudge a pawn of the King!

What chance did the dictator have to do any damage when a chess champion knew how to make the right kind of wrong moves?

Checkmate

For Aradjo

By

ROG PHILLIPS



THE SECRETARY of State frowned down angrily at Aradjo Ihanrani's serenely mocking face. "I'm not quite sure I heard you aright," he said.

"I think you did," Aradjo said calmly. "However, I'll repeat my statement. My statement was: war is always avoidable. Only the supremely stupid need resort to it, even when an enemy is on one's borders with armed hordes intent on invasion."

"Do you know what you're saying?" the Secretary of State asked

frigidly. "You're saying—"

"I'm perfectly aware of the direct implications of my statement," Aradjo cut in. "As a statesman, you don't need to descend to the level of explaining the obvious. I'm not a statesman, thank Heaven. I'm only the world's greatest chess player. In chess—"

"In chess!" the Secretary of State interrupted in retaliation. "Man, are you so—so blinded by your successes against inanimate objects on a chess board that you have acquired a God-

complex? The affairs of the world can't be compared in the same breath!"

"Do you play chess?" Aradjo asked with innocence.

"No! I have no time for such games. Trying to keep the foreign policy on an even keel is a twenty-four-hour-a-day job."

"Then," Aradjo said quietly, "the least that can be said is that you are guilty of the crime you accuse me of—judging something you know nothing about. Chess."

"Hang it, I do know about chess. Used to play it quite well in college."

"But you were no champion. Not even, perhaps, in some small circle of chess players?"

The Secretary of State turned a brick red. "No," he said curtly. "And if you're going to give me another of your smug smiles and remark that what is needed is a Secretary of State who's a champion, save your breath. No champion could prevent this war."

"Perhaps not," Aradjo agreed. "But I can."

He had said it so calmly, and the actual meaning of what he had said was so far from what anyone could have expected, that it took the Secretary of State several seconds to grasp what lay behind his words.

"Hah!," he snorted. "I might have expected something like that. It bears out my contention. Perhaps I should turn my cloak of office over to you, so that you could wave your scented fingers under your powdered nose and let the Argenean Ambassador convey to his master, Radnar, your consent to his kissing your feet?"

"Exactly," Aradjo said. "You hit it on the nail head. Of course, we would have to be more subtle about it than that. Your plan, tactically correct though it is, is too childishly impulsive. A trait you have demonstrated before, I might add."

"Why, you—" the Secretary of State started to sputter.

"And are demonstrating right now," Aradjo said calmly. "In the first place, it would be unwise for you to step down and let me take your place, unselfish though that offer may have been. In the second place, one can seldom get an intractable foe to accept degrading suggestions directly. The essentials of your plan are quite sound, though. The kissing of my feet was meant figuratively, however, I surmise."

"You are the most preposterous pup it's ever been my misfortune to encounter," the Secretary of State said frigidly. "I must ask you to—" He stopped, at a loss for words.

"To stop exposing your ineptitude at handling delicate situations?" Aradjo suggested. "I see your point. There are reporters here. In fact, over half of these men around us are reporters, since this is the Press Club. I'm here myself only because my uncle owns one of the larger newspapers. It's really your party, and you have a right to expect nothing but respect. You may even have earned it in the past. But since I've gone this far, I'll go a step further. I'll bet you ten times your yearly salary against that yearly salary that I can prevent this war between Argenea and Usamere."

"You mean," the Secretary of State said, a triumphant light appearing in the depths of his eyes, "that you are making a flat bet with me at those stakes that you can prevent this war?"

"Exactly," Aradjo said. "And not in your office. I will do it as a private citizen. Do you accept?"

The Secretary of State looked around smugly. "Naturally," he said, holding out his hand.

Aradjo accepted it, shaking the hand with a grave dignity. "I will need certain information from your department of Government before I start,"

he said, "and also a certain amount of cooperation from you. Strictly q. t., of course."

"Oh, no," the Secretary of State laughed. "That wasn't part of the bet."

"You mean you refuse to cooperate with me after solemnly agreeing to permit me to attempt to prevent war?" Aradjo asked, his eyes round with feigned amazement.

The Secretary of State looked around at the ring of faces and realized, too late, that he had been trapped.

"**A**LL RIGHT," he said with great weariness. "what do you expect of me in the way of cooperation?"

Aradjo Ihanrani's manner changed abruptly from lazy superiority to sharp alertness. He looked gravely about him at the ring of faces.

"Of course you all realize," he said, "that if one word of this leaks out, I'll fail—and lose my life as well, in all likelihood." He waited until they had all nodded. "Very well, then. You have an underground organization in Argenea?"

"We might have," the Secretary of State said cautiously. "though not enough of one to overthrow Radnar—if that's your plan."

"No," Aradjo said, "that's not my plan."

"Then what is your plan?" the Secretary asked in an irritated voice.

"I believe you are to make a speech over the international radio hookup day after tomorrow," Aradjo said. "The announcements are in the papers. I want you to have a heart attack just as you finish your speech, and while the television cameras are still on you, so that the entire world will see it. You must show mild signs of distress a couple of times toward the end of your speech. Mark them on prepared text so that you won't forget

them. Have the ambulance men or the doctor state emphatically that you are dead before they leave your office with you on the stretcher."

"And have the President appoint you my successor?" the Secretary sneered.

"No, of course not," Aradjo said patiently. "Arrange it so that the radio station announcer will scoop the newspapers with the announcement that you have just died. An hour later, have the hospital emphatically deny it. Remain in complete seclusion in the hospital for two days, then return to your normal way of living. One of these reporters will then write a suggestive article about mechanical hearts and the possibility of your having been revived by one or actually having one substituted for your old worn-out heart. The article must be speculative only. Nothing concrete. There must be no interviews with you or with the hospital. In the next editions, the rest of these reporters here with us now must emphatically deny it. So emphatically that it will gain credence."

"Just what good will that do?" The Secretary was so puzzled he forgot to be skeptical.

"In chess, as you may remember," Aradjo said, "we make moves. What I have just outlined is a move also. A pawn move, I might say. A very important though not decisive one. It should be executed carefully, and I will expect it to be executed exactly as I have outlined. If I do not succeed in my game of chess there will have been no serious harm done, since global war will be upon us then anyway. But if I do succeed, you will have been instrumental in that success. Almost vitally so. There are other moves also."

"What are some of the other moves?"

"Well—four days from today, the *Queen Moradja* sails for Argenea.

When it is twelve hours out, it must develop 'engine trouble'. It must then radio its apparent trouble and ask for assistance. The Government must immediately step into the picture and rush another passenger liner out to take off the passengers and continue them on their journey. The *Queen Moradja* must then be surrounded by a ring of battleships and patrolling aircraft. Apparent great secrecy must accompany this. By this time, Mr. Secretary, you will be back at work. You news reporters, each in your own way, must speculate on why the *Moradja* has stopped and is being surrounded with such secrecy. And you, Mr. Secretary, must issue denials. After seven days of this, the battleships will allow the ship to proceed to its destination. It would be wise to take none of the ship personnel into your confidence. Instead, have your own men with proper powers on the ship, and have them order the captain to stop, order the passengers onto the other ship, and order the battleships to patrol."

"Another pawn move?" the Secretary of State asked.

"No..." Aradjo pursed his lips. "It smacks more of a Bishop move. No, I change that. It would definitely be the Queen's Knight moving out onto the board."

"And your next move?" the Secretary asked.

"Aside from memorizing the identities and locations of key subversives in Argenea so that in case I need to contact them I may, that is all," Aradjo said calmly. "That should be sufficient to prevent war."

"Then you're going to Argenea?" a reporter asked.

"Whatever gave you such an absurd idea?" Aradjo assumed bland innocence.

"Then what are you going to do?" the reporter persisted.

Aradjo Ihanrani studied the man thoughtfully. "Why don't you tag along with me and find out?" he suggested. "You might even be of invaluable assistance to me."

"**H**ERE WE are up ahead, Kirol," Aradjo said.

Kirol did not need to look to know the place. It was the Argenean Embassy.

"Do you want me to wait outside?" he asked.

"Perhaps it would be awkward having you along," Aradjo said. "A member of the press... This is what we'll do. We'll continue along the street and circle the block. You will get out and catch a taxi to drive you up to the entrance. Then you go inside. In that way, you will be there during the time I am there, and you can observe my every move."

Ten minutes later Aradjo drove his car up to the Embassy and got out, ignoring the signs that gave notice he was in the spot reserved for the Argenean Ambassador's own car.

"Sorry, sir," the doorman said politely, "but you can't park there. It's reserved."

"And who says I can't?" Aradjo asked imperiously. "Perhaps you don't know who I am. I assure you you will learn soon enough."

He stepped calmly around the surprised doorman and entered the building. The ornate waiting room was empty of people except for the reporter, Kirol. Behind an ornately carved rail was a desk obviously intended for a receptionist.

"See here..." the doorman who had followed him in said with a mixture of determination and cautious politeness.

Aradjo strode briskly to the receptionist's desk and rapped loudly on its surface with his gloved knuckles.

"Where is everyone?" he asked the doorman angrily. "I'm not accustomed

to waiting like this. Get someone immediately."

An oversize intricately paneled door opened. The rather heavy man who stood there was instantly recognizable as one of Argenea's chief foreign relations officials. The dark scowl on his heavy features was intended to awe even the most important of visitors into silence.

"Are you the receptionist?" Aradjo asked imperiously, pretending not to recognize the man. "I'm here to see the Ambassador of Argenea. He will see me when he knows why I'm here." As he said this, he took out a card and laid it on the receptionist's desk. "I am the inventor of a weapon," he went on to explain, his voice oozing importance. "Whether the Ambassador will see me or not at this time, I intend to demonstrate my weapon tomorrow night. By killing the Secretary of State of the foul country I had the misfortune to be born in. Usamere. Now, be a good man and announce me to your master, the Ambassador."

"The Ambassador is not here now," the heavy man said, his face and tone expressionless. "He will be here day after tomorrow."

"You lie," Aradjo said frigidly. "Very well. But I am not coming back here. After tomorrow night I will go to Argenea and directly to Radnar himself. And part of my price for my weapon will be to see you and this insolent doorman sentenced to hard labor for ten years."

He marched disdainfully past the doorman, stepping on the man's foot. When the doorman started after him, the Argenean foreign relations official said something in Argenean that made him stop.

When Aradjo reached the sidewalk, Kirol was just slipping into the car. Aradjo slipped behind the wheel and pulled hastily away from the curb. Safely in the thick of traffic, he re-

laxed and looked sidelong at the reporter, chuckling with satisfaction.

"So that was the reason you had in mind for your pawn move!" Kirol exclaimed admiringly. "Very smooth. But how are you going to back it up?"

"That will be quite easy," Aradjo said. "But first we must book passage on the *Queen Moradja*."

"I thought you said you weren't going to Argenea?" Kirol said.

"I'm not," Aradjo said. "I'm just going to buy the tickets."

"Next," he said as they left the travel bureau office, "we must assemble our luggage. Two large steamer trunks should be enough. We can carry them in the open trunk compartment of the car until we get them to my apartment."

"NOW WHAT?" Kirol asked.

Aradjo was looking happily at the two large trunks sitting in the middle of the garage floor.

"I'm expecting some packages," he said. "They'll go into the trunks. Meanwhile, we should paint the destination on each trunk so that it won't get lost. The paint should have time to dry."

"What will be in the packages?" Kirol asked.

"Nothing," Aradjo said. Absolutely nothing."

"All right, don't tell me."

"But I did!" Aradjo protested. "I told you there would be nothing in them, and that's the truth."

Kirol watched as Aradjo took a can of paint and a brush and carefully painted a name and address on the side and top of each of the trunks. As the name emerged from the brush strokes, Kirol whistled in surprise. The name was that of the Argenean dictator—Radnar!

"How do you expect to get the trunks on the boat?" he asked. "Anything that would be sent to Radnar

would be closely inspected."

But the next morning when the packages came and were placed in the trunks, he was again surprised. The packages were bulky and heavy, and wrapped in a veritable mat of thick wrapping paper.

Along with them had come a small can of paint. After they were locked in the trunks, Aradjo used the new paint to write his own name and the name of a famous Argenean resort hotel directly over Radnar's address. When he had finished, there seemed only the one address.

"What's the idea?" Kirol asked, mystified.

"By the time these trunks are taken off the boat in Argenea," he smirked, "they will have assumed monumental importance."

"I don't get it," Kirol said. "Who's going to scrape off the paint and find Radnar's address underneath?"

"The mother of us all," Aradjo said. "Nature. You see, this second paint is one that has no body. It will hold together reasonably well when untouched, but when thoroughly dried will be nothing but powder. In the storage hold it will completely wipe off. There will be a mystery of two trunks loaded onto the boat under the name of Aradjo Ihanrani—that vanished during the voyage."

"And a mysterious stopping of the boat in midocean!" Kirol said in awed tones.

"Exactly," Aradjo said.

"What a plot!" Kirol said. "A weapon that kills the Secretary of State. It's shipped in two trunks to Argenea. The ship is stopped by the Usamerean navy and searched for seven days, then allowed to proceed on its way." He stopped suddenly, frowning. "But then there'll be two trunks in the hold anyway, not on the list. They'll open them and find the stuff you put in them."

"**B**UT THEY won't," Aradjo said complacently. "You see, the carefully wrapped objects are made of dry ice. The seven days' delay on the high seas is to allow the dry ice sufficient time to vanish."

"It's a nice idea," Kirol said, "but they'll guess that. The carefully wrapped parcels of air could be nothing else."

"I took care of that," Aradjo said, "by having the inner wrappings soaked in water. When the dry ice is gone, that frozen water will melt and collapse the wrappings. There will be nothing but loose paper."

"I see your strategy now," Kirol said. "You want to convince Radnar that a weapon has been invented that can kill at a distance without a trace, that you tried to smuggle it to him, and the Usamerean Government got hold of it and now has it. But do you think that will stop the war? I don't."

"You don't? Why not?"

"There are already weapons far more dangerous than that," Kirol said. "Radnar won't stop out of fear for his own skin."

"Granted. But he would stop if there were an actual weapon that could ensure the quick defeat of Argenea in a war, and it was proven beyond question that there existed such a weapon."

"Sure," Kirol said.

"I actually have such a weapon," Aradjo said calmly. "I've already built it and tried it out—and it works. This—" He took in the two trunks by a gesture. "—is more or less just horseplay."

"Where is this—this weapon?" Kirol asked.

Aradjo smiled. "Already on its way to Argenea," he said. "In fact, I would say that it's probably already safely hidden there where no one can prevent it from working. Why do you

suppose I wanted the names of subversives this country can trust?" He studied Kirol, silent laughter in his eyes. "As of a few hours ago," he said softly, "if Radnar declares war on Usamere, he will die, and there will be a change of government in Argenea before his first planes can start their journey across the ocean."

"You're kidding!" Kirol said.

"Am I?" Aradjo smiled enigmatically.

ON THE television screen, the Secretary of State appeared so vividly that he might have been in the same room. Sitting alertly erect about the room were the various members of the Press Club, including Kirol and Aradjo. And they were held together by the bond of conspiracy, each watching the hidden drama the Secretary was enacting.

"It is evident even to the most blindly optimistic," he was saying with ponderous slowness, "that Radnar will not stop until he has placed the entire planet under bondage. We will never begin a war. Not even a preventive war. But we will not, we dare not..."

He glanced down at his prepared text, frowned, and shook his head vaguely. The moment of silence was dramatic in the extreme.

"We dare not," he said, taking up his speech again, "sit passively and let ourselves be enslaved. Though it cost us half of those alive today, the freedom of future generations demands that we pay the cost, if it be exacted of us."

The Secretary stopped talking and looked directly into the screen, an expression of pain crossing his features. Abruptly, he seemed to try to rise to his feet. Half way erect behind his large desk, he collapsed, his prepared speech slipping from his fingers.

Another man darted into view on

the screen. The Secretary was out of sight behind the desk. The newcomer also vanished as he bent down. Part of his head reappeared above the desk. His voice, startled and horrified, sounded clearly.

"My God! He's dead!"

Then the man seemed to remember he was on the air. He turned and looked directly into the screen. Abruptly, the entire scene vanished as it was cut off the air.

The intense silence that followed was broken by the voice of one of the Press Club members: "If that was acting, it was the best performance I've ever seen!"

"It could have been real," another voice spoke up. "Just because a man is going to simulate a heart attack at a certain time, doesn't mean he can't have a real and unscheduled one at that very time."

Kirol was staring at Aradjo, his eyes wide in speculation. Aradjo smiled serenely and stood up.

"He did quite well," he said. "Quite sporting of him. I think I will go home now." He glanced at Kirol. "I'm expecting a caller this evening."

Kirol left with him. As they drove across town he sat silent, a dark scowl on his face. It wasn't until Aradjo had parked his car in the apartment house garage that Kirol spoke.

"Where do you want me?" he asked. "Hidden in the bedroom?"

Aradjo hesitated, then nodded. "That would be as good as any place," he said. "I hardly expect any rough stuff, but it would be wise to have someone handy. And, of course, there's always the possibility that no one will show up so soon."

THEY RODE up in the elevator in silence. The muffled silence of the hall followed them from the elevator to the door. Aradjo's key scraped

loudly. Kirol went past him through the opened door and switched on the lights.

"I'm glad that's over," Aradjo said as he pulled the key out of the lock and closed the door. "Something could have gone wrong, you know. But now it's over and the two trunks are safely in the process of being loaded onto the *Moradja*—" He stopped abruptly and began sniffing. "Someone who eats crillweed is around!" he said. "I can smell his breath!"

"Yes," a heavy voice sounded. The bedroom door opened slowly, revealing the foreign relations official of the Argenean Embassy.

"How did you get in here?" Aradjo demanded angrily. "And if you think you can get into my good graces now, you're mistaken. I haven't forgotten yesterday."

"Allow me to introduce myself," the man said. "I am Kurn Ardil. It took me a little time to contact my government, but now I have been authorized to pay whatever price you ask for— for this weapon."

"You may inform your master," Aradjo said loftily, "that I refuse to discuss the matter with an underling whose incarceration at hard labor for a minimum of ten years is part of my price. I intend to go to Argenea and talk with him. And if I'm not treated right, he'd better look out. Now, get out." He went to the door and opened it, standing beside it with haughty disdain.

"You are going to Argenea?" Kurn Ardil said, his eyes lighting up.

"That's what I said," Aradjo said curtly.

"I will tell my master," Kurn Ardil said with ill-concealed amusement.

He bowed slightly and left.

Aradjo slammed the door violently, then sped to the bedroom and looked in to make sure no one else was there. When he came back, he was grinning

broadly.

"FOR A MAN who isn't going to Argenea on the *Moradja*, you're certainly making every preparation to go," Kirol said dryly, swinging his leg idly where it dangled over the edge of the table.

Aradjo glanced up from his packing of three suitcases, a smile appearing briefly. He continued his packing without answering.

"I'm surprised Kurn Ardil hasn't shown up," Kirol said a few moments later.

"He's convinced I'll soon be in Argenea where they can do as they wish with me," Aradjo told him. "Why should he risk trouble here?" He locked the last suitcase and straightened up. "I guess we're ready now," he said. "You're sure the other reporters will be on hand?"

Kirol chuckled. "Foolish boy," he said. "They're like wild horses charging at the bit. Not one of them that wouldn't sell his soul to be able to give this to his editor."

"Help me down to the car with the suitcases," Aradjo said. He started to pick one of them up, then paused, smiling. "Could be that part of it could leak out after the *Moradja* is finally on her way to Argenea," he said. "I'll let them know just what they can print before then."

The sky was cloudless as they drove across town to the harbor area. Almost directly overhead, the twin suns gyrated in their tight spiral, revolving around each other once every twenty-seven seconds.

Aradjo parked the car in a garage two blocks from the dock. Kirol carried one of the bags until they were within sight of the huge ocean liner, then turned it over to Aradjo.

"Looks like some excitement ahead," he said. "I'll find out what it's all about."

By the time Aradjo reached the dock, Kirol was ready to rejoin him.

"Looks like this is it," he said. "The entire staff of the Argenean Embassy is boarding the boat." He grinned. "Including Kurn Ardil. Maybe they plan on working you over when they get out to sea."

Aradjo pursed his lips into a whistle. "This eventuality I didn't anticipate," he said. "It's going to be embarrassing to the Usamerean Government to stop that ship on the high seas now. Or maybe not, since war is imminent anyhow."

"But now they'll know you aren't on board," Kirol said under his breath as the crowd grew thicker around them.

"That was to be expected anyhow," Aradjo mumbled.

And then the reporters had descended upon him according to plan. Cameras were flashing.

"You're Aradjo Ihanrani, the chess champion of the world, aren't you?" a voice demanded.

"Why, yes," Aradjo said, a mixture of mystification and pleasure on his features.

"Why are you going to Argenea at this time?" another asked.

"To play chess! Of course!" Aradjo's tone implied there could be no other reason to drag anyone across the ocean.

"But don't you know war is imminent?"

"War? War?" Aradjo said. "Pardon me, gentlemen. Maybe I'm behind the times, but has war been declared yet? If not, how can you say it is imminent? And even if you are right, what does war have to do with the chess tournament at Smolsz two weeks from now. I'm quite sure that neither the President nor Radnar will let their differences break that up. The outcome of that tournament is of historic importance."

The reporters, suspecting sarcasm or hidden humor, laughed. Aradjo frowned at them as though he wondered what they were laughing about. But underneath the surface, all of them were aware of Kurn Ardil standing on the gangplank taking it all in.

"And now, if you will pardon me..." Aradjo pushed firmly toward the gangplank. When he reached it, he turned to the reporters. "Would you like me to make an important prediction?"

"We certainly would!" several voices said quickly, eagerly.

"I predict..." Aradjo paused dramatically. "I predict that I will defeat any of my opponents at Smolsz in thirty-four moves!"

KIROL, IN the thick of the crowd, watched Aradjo walk with great self-importance up the gangplank. He also saw Kurn Ardil at the top and to one side, on deck.

He saw Aradjo pause at the top of the gangplank, less than three feet from Ardil.

His keen eyes saw the sudden change on Ardil's face, hastily concealed.

The next moment, Aradjo had stepped off the gangplank and was lost to sight. Kurn Ardil remained where he was for another minute, then straightened up and went back from the rail.

Kirol slipped out of the crowd and went back to the garage where the car was. Aradjo had told him to wait there. The whole strategy of the current move was quite simple. Aradjo would go to his cabin. There, he would swiftly change into a disguise. Different type of clothing, nostrils widened by inserted metal forms, tinted glasses. He had already rehearsed the change, timing it. Then he would join those who had boarded the ship to see their loved ones safely started over-

seas. On a ship as large as the *Moradja*, there wouldn't be time to determine absolutely that he wasn't still aboard in the twenty-four hours before the ship was to be stopped.

A long lonely blast sounded. Warning to passing shipping that the giant liner was about to move out. A moment later Aradjo in his disguise appeared through the opened doors of the garage.

"What did you say to Ardil that startled him so?" Kirol asked immediately.

Aradjo started the motor and slipped into low. "You have sharp eyes," he said, without looking at Kirol. "I just told him I wouldn't be on the ship when it sailed."

"You told him that!" Kirol exploded.

"It was a passing impulse," Aradjo said, a twinkle in his eyes. "It posed a dilemma to him. If he stayed aboard and I didn't, he'd be stuck on board without me. If he got off and I didn't, it would be as bad."

Kirol stared at Aradjo several minutes as the car wove through traffic. Finally, he shook his head.

"I don't believe you give a damn whether war starts or not," he said. "You're just having the time of your life mystifying people. Including me."

ARADJO laughed. "You're partly right," he said. "If you've read my book on chess strategy, you will know that my technique consists of making three randomly spaced nonsense moves in the early stages of the game. That is, with professionals and masters only," he added hastily. "With an amateur they would be wasted, and I would lose the game. The master is always trying to penetrate my style and the nonsense element is worth four and a third extra moves, or one Bishop and a fourth of a pawn."

"That's too technical for me," Kirol said, disgruntled. "What's your next move?"

To his amazement, Aradjo suddenly turned pale. "My next move?" he echoed slowly in an obvious stall to gain control of himself. A smile quirked the corners of his mouth. "My next move is to go to Argenea—by plane."

Kirol gasped, at an utter loss for words.

"But the very essence of your game," he finally managed to say, "demands that you stay out of their hands. As long as you do that, they'll believe from the interest the government shows in the *Maradja* that you really have a weapon on board, and that a weapon really exists!"

"I told you," Aradjo said, "that such a weapon does exist, and that it is now in Argenea. I have to be there to use it. And they won't catch me. I'll be entering the country under an assumed name and with a passport obtained by the Secretary of State for me."

"Even so, you'll be risking your life," Kirol said. "The very fact that they'll be convinced the weapon exists will make it suicidal. If you're caught, you'll be tortured until you give them the secret of the thing, and since you can't—because such a weapon doesn't exist—they'll just keep on torturing you, thinking you're just stubborn!"

"I'm going," Aradjo said quietly.

"How soon?" Kirol asked.

Aradjo lifted his arm and glanced at his wristwatch. "The plane leaves in an hour and twelve minutes," he said calmly.

He had reached a north and south crossroad. He turned north toward the international airport.

"Aren't you going to change your disguise?"

"This one should do quite well,"

Aradjo said, not taking his eyes off traffic.

Twenty minutes later, he turned into the parking lot at the airport. Kirol followed Aradjo to the exit visa desk and saw him take tickets and passport out of his pocket. The official ran a special down the list and checked off a name he couldn't quite make out.

"Well, goodbye," Aradjo said. "If things work out, I'll see you in the clubroom the day after peace is declared."

He regarded the confused expression on Kirol's face briefly, then turned and walked swiftly toward the doors to the field.

KIROL ENTERED the clubroom, his eyes darting swiftly over the scattered groups.

"Hi, Kirol," another reporter said. "Have you heard from him yet?"

"No," Kirol said. "I've been calling his apartment ever since it happened. No luck. Maybe he isn't back yet."

"How did he manage it?" a second man asked.

Kirol looked around at the crowd that was collecting. "I don't know," he said. "I was with him practically every minute until he caught the plane, and I can't figure it out."

All eyes went past Kirol toward the door. He turned to see what they were looking at. The Secretary of State had just arrived.

"Aradjo called me," he announced. "He said he would meet me here. Has he arrived yet?" He looked around questioningly, then added, "I'll wait. He should be here soon." A wry smile appeared. "I have a check with me for a year's salary. I lost my bet, and I don't need to tell any of you that I'm very happy about it. I am."

"I'm happy that you are," a new voice spoke up. "We should all be happy."

Everyone looked toward the door again. Aradjo stood there, smiling. At first glance, he seemed the same as when they had last seen him a month before; but then little things became subtly apparent. Kirol saw them with a growing sick feeling. Aradjo's face was thinner. And though his head still maintained its disdainful angle of elevation, there was added something that sent a chill of horror through Kirol. And the eyes. And why were his hands in his pockets? In his thoughts, as Aradjo stood in the doorway, Kirol came to the conclusion that he was looking at an unbreakable spirit that had recently withstood more than an ordinary man—ten ordinary men—could stand without breaking.

Impulsively, he rushed forward, holding out his hands. "Aradjo!" he cried, deep concern in his voice.

"Why, Kirol," Aradjo said brusquely. "You sound like a hen greeting her biddies."

"I have the check ready for you, Aradjo," the Secretary of State said. "But, man, what's happened to you? You look like a stallion who's been beaten to within an inch of its life. Did they torture you?"

"Of course," Aradjo said crisply, coming on into the room. "May I have the check, please?"

He took a hand out of a pocket and extended it to take the check. A silent gasp went up in the room as every eye fixed on that hand. Each of the fingers was neatly bandaged.

Aradjo took the check gingerly in his bandaged fingers and glanced at the figure on it. "Thank you," he said.

"What happened?" the Secretary asked humbly.

"I won my game of chess," Aradjo said. "I knew I would. And I suppose I owe you a debt of gratitude for playing your part so well. If you had not done so, I would have been left in the

position of an idiot running around blindly in thick boulevard traffic."

"Yes," the Secretary said. "I played my part well because I realized that maybe you could prevent the war. I realized that after I had left this club-room after we had made our bet. I suddenly knew that anyone capable of forcing me into such a bet in the manner you did, must have an abnormal amount of ability. Perhaps enough to succeed. So when I played my part, I was keenly conscious of the fact that my least facial expression, my least act, might mean the sacrifice or salvation of countless thousands of lives. But—even yet—I can make no sense out of it. Could you explain what you did? Or would you prefer to keep it secret?"

"There's no reason now to keep it secret," Aradjo said. He looked around the circle of faces. His eyes came to rest on Kirol. "First, I owe you an apology, Kirol."

"For what?" Kirol asked, startled.

"You will see shortly," Aradjo said. "Now, if you will permit me to sit down, and perhaps have something to drink..."

"WHEN I forced you into the position of making that bet, Mr. Secretary," Aradjo began, "I had no idea whatever of seriously tackling the problem. As I think back, I believe I was motivated by the conviction that you would never make such an insane bet, and if you did you would balk at following such absurd instructions." He stared at the rim of the glass held in bandaged fingers for a long moment, then chuckled humorlessly. "That's what comes of playing against amateurs—even when they are in the professional ranks. But once you had accepted, I realized I was definitely in for it. I would have to make good. Not only for the bet itself and possibly

to preserve the peace, but also to save you your job.

"I immediately, therefore, applied the rules of chess as laid down in my several textbooks on the subject. Certain moves had been made, or the pieces touched so that they would of necessity be moved in their proper sequence. There was no inkling in my mind of a proper strategy or plan of attack.

"It was quite like a game in which, after the first few moves, I discover my opponent has already set in motion a form of attack new to me that stands a chance of winning. I immediately discard my own game and use the already emplaced men as a basis of defense and eventually of attack."

"You mean my 'heart attack' was not a carefully thought out move?" the Secretary asked incredulously.

"Of course not!" Aradjo snapped. "It was merely the first thing that popped into my mind that I was quite sure you would refuse to do! The stopping of the largest ocean liner in existence for a week on the high seas was an even more preposterous suggestion designed to force you to refuse to cooperate with me—and thus give me a bloodless victory in a childish, at best, argument.

"I didn't quite realize how deeply you felt your responsibility, or quite how I affected you personally. You see, I'm not accustomed to thinking privately that I'm as smart as I try to appear in public.

"But I saw the moves were going to be made. And immediately something else happened that made me think I had gone beyond the point of no return. Kirol attached himself to me. It was a most fascinating development. A piece on the board whose color was neither black nor white, though it was coated with white quite conspicuously. There was a strong possibility

that Kirol was an instrument of Radnar—"

"Me?" Kirol interrupted indignantly.

"Yes—you," Aradjo said dryly. "If you had not attached yourself to me, I would have undoubtedly called up the Secretary the next day and called the whole thing off with an abject apology. As it was, I thought I might have something tangible in the way of an enemy. And you crystalized in my thoughts the idea of a multiple strategy. Each move with many interpretations. To you I painted the idea of using the evidence of the Secretary's 'heart attack' and the stopping of the *Moradja* at sea as evidence of a secret weapon. At the same time, I kept insisting I had a real secret weapon. Meanwhile, you were being investigated. By the way, did you know that Aua Vehig, the first girl you were ever in love with—second year grade school, I believe—is living in this city and still remembers you? Her phone number is Trialbin 43-87628, if you wish to call her.

"You were not finally cleared of all suspicion until I boarded the *Moradja*. A State Department man was waiting for me in my stateroom. The news that you were completely loyal crystalized my final strategy."

"While we were at it," the Secretary of State spoke up, "we did a good job of it. There were literally tons of highly incriminating documents aboard under the diplomatic seal of the Argenean Government."

"Yes, I know," Aradjo said, "However, that had little or no effect on the final outcome of events. Kurn Ardil believed and still believes that those were of least concern to you." He lit a cigaret with slow unconcern, being very careful of his bandaged fingers. "I had had no intention of actually going to Argenea until I learned on the

boat that you were cleared, Kirol," he said quietly.

"BUT WE drove directly to the international airport and you already had your reservations!" Kirol exclaimed.

"You thought I did," Aradjo corrected. "The tickets I used were boat tickets. The passport was the one I had had made out in case I decided to remain on the boat at the last moment. The reservations for the plane to Argenea were made by the State Department while we were driving out to the airport. You see," a sad smile twisted his lips, "although you had been cleared, I regarded that clearance then as merely something to gamble on heavily, while still making routine moves based on the premise that you were a spy reporting my every act."

"I think," the Secretary of State said slowly, "that I'm beginning to understand you. Each move was opportunistic. Your strategy was extremely fluid, working toward several goals simultaneously, building up against possible attack from every visible piece on the board."

"Yes," Aradjo said, "until I saw that I could certainly checkmate in the next few moves. Then my strategy drove straight to that goal of checkmate, not considering sideline sacrifices." He flexed his bandaged fingers gently. "One line of strategy was to build up, if possible, a belief that there existed a weapon capable of killing any man to the exclusion of all others, and at a distance while he was thoroughly protected. To add to that there was the stopping of the *Moradja*."

"But, at the same time, I was aware that belief in the existence of such a weapon would be practically impossible to create under any circumstances. Nothing in science points to the possibility of such a weapon."

"Another line of strategy was to build up in my opponents a belief that I was a crackpot with a god complex. And along with it a sincere doubt that I could be that stupid.

"A third line of strategy was to build up the conviction that I intended to call on Radnar in person.

"A fourth line was to learn of the everyday actions of Radnar himself. The State Department directed certain subversives in Argenea to provide me with those data. Along with that, I learned the identities and how to get hold of these key subversives if I needed them.

"I want to point out that these were isolated strategies. Any connection they may seem to have had was accidental. Any purpose they eventually served was opportunistic rather than by design. I had not the slightest idea up until the moment I learned Kirol was not an Argenea spy. how I could make Radnar decide to come to terms for continued peace.

"AND THEN, as so often happens in chess, I looked over the array of the pieces in midgame and saw my chance for victory, if I dared take it.

"I flew to Argenea. I was quite certain that Radnar himself would know about me by now. I was quite certain he would have toyed amusedly with the idea of my being determined to deal only with him. So, after calling on certain key subversives and issuing them instructions in the name of the Usamerean Government, I boldly called on him."

"What were your instructions to those key subversives?" the Secretary of State asked.

"One—I believe you know which one, sir—was suffering from cancer of the brain. I ordered him to make an attempt to assassinate Radnar, but in

such a way that he would not succeed. In other words, commit suicide, which he had long wished to do to end his pain, but in the services of international peace.

"A second one I ordered to give the go-ahead on a minor revolution in an outlying state of Argenea. The third one received orders to start several fires in such a careful way that it would be impossible to determine definitely that they were arson."

The Secretary nodded, satisfied. The rest of the audience looked more mystified.

"With that done," Aradjo said, "I got rid of my disguise and called at the Capitol and demanded to see Radnar, giving my true name."

Someone in the circle of listeners uttered an amazed whistle.

"I demanded fifty million dollars in cash, a billion dollars in various properties all over the world, and—" Radnar smiled, "—the immediate imprisonment of Kurn Ardil for ten years at hard labor. My alternative was death to Radnar himself."

The eyes watching him were very wide now. Aradjo glanced at the Secretary with a nervous smile.

"I would have been sunk if he had accepted my terms," he said. "I was quite afraid he might after my experience with you accepting absurd terms. But, fortunately, he was more experienced and ruthless than you. He had me taken away to get the secret of my weapon by torturing it out of me."

Aradjo turned pale and put his hand to his forehead.

"No, no. I'll be all right," he reassured those who rushed forward to help him.

"PAIN IS a strange thing," Aradjo said after a moment. "If it's forced upon you, it can be unbearable. In my case, I had deliberately sought

it. That knowledge kept me from breaking. But even if I had broken, my course couldn't have altered."

He smiled ruefully.

"I started out," he said, "by telling them the whole truth. The bet with you, Mr. Secretary. My instructions to you. Everything. I waited until I had experienced several hours of torture before confessing the complete truth, just to make it convincing.

"And of course they didn't believe me. I had known they wouldn't, and had told the truth first so that if I lost control later they would think I was merely repeating.

"From the complete truth I switched to contradictory stories. I insisted there was a weapon, but that it was on the Argenea unless the Usamerean navy had found it and taken it off. Then I told them the two trunks contained nothing but dry ice for weight, and would be empty when they arrived in Argenea.

"Part of the time Radnar himself stood beside me while his torturers worked on me. I became defiant. Finally I told him the weapon was already in Argenea and would be used to force someone to try to assassinate him, just to prove to him that it was in the hands of someone who knew how to operate it.

"That brought me a welcome relief from the torture for almost two days. Then it was resumed. I threatened to have it used to start a revolt in a certain outlying province."

Aradjo looked at his bandaged fingers ruefully.

"I believe the torturer had instructions to leave me alone for a time after that," he said. "But he continued torturing me for the sadistic pleasure he got out of it.

"Radnar came back, finally. I confessed that I had gone to various subversives and issued them their instruc-

tions just to make him believe I had a weapon and someone was using it for me.

"He listened to me, then ordered me released. After that he had me taken up to his own private quarters and treated by his personal physician. A very beautiful girl fed me and served as my constant nurse. For twenty-four hours I didn't see Radnar. Then he came in."

Aradjo looked past his listeners, a faraway light in his eyes.

"The big thrill of chess," he finally continued, "is when the fight is over. It isn't checkmate quite yet, but you look at your opponent and see the realization dawn in his eyes, the droop of his shoulders, that the next move or the move after is indeed checkmate, and there is nothing he can do to prevent it.

"I experienced that thrill as he stood beside my bed looking down at me. It was my move—and my move would place Radnar in checkmate, ending the game.

LOOKING back now I believe it will always remain the supreme moment of my life. I sent my nurse from the room. Then I calmly told Radnar not to start war, to immediately accept conditions for permanent peace and to hold to them.

"He immediately agreed. He then invited me to remain in Argenea, but I told him I preferred to return to Usamere, and might perhaps come to visit him sometime in the near future after I recovered."

"That much we know," someone said. "It's a matter of current history that Argenea and Usamere are right this minute mapping out courses of active cooperation or world peace on a long term basis. But why? Why would Radnar suddenly give in like that? It doesn't make sense!"

"Ah, but it does!" Aradjo said. "You see, I told him that unless he did as I told him, he would die and Argenea would break up into several small states engaged in a long civil war."

"You told him!" the Secretary of State said. "But why would he believe that? The subversive elements in all Argenea aren't strong enough and co-ordinated enough to even get started on such a plan."

"Why would he believe me?" Aradjo echoed, a silent smile on his lips. "Perhaps because I had told him the truth time and again without his believing me. I had told him the truth and I had told him lies, and he had believed none of it. But in all that I had told him I had studiously avoided even indirect mention of one thing and, pig-like, he was driven directly toward that belief by my every move."

"He refused to believe I had a weapon. He refused to believe the Secretary of State faked a heart attack at my orders, and the Usamere Navy stopped the *Moradja* at my orders. He refused to believe that the man who tried to

assassinate him had done so at my orders. He refused to believe that the revolt in that outlying province was at my orders."

Aradjo picked up the glass of now stale beverage and sipped it, shrugging his shoulders with an air of indifference.

"So," he said, "he finally came to the belief which I had been driving him toward. He became convinced that I must have the gift of prophecy. That was the only rational explanation."

Aradjo looked around at the circle of faces in various stages of amazed comprehension.

"It was all so simple," he said, standing up tiredly. Setting his empty glass down on the stand beside his chair, he straightened and threw back his shoulders, his head coming erect with something of his old haughty disdain settling over him. "I'm surprised," he added with a note of finality, "that the Secretary of State didn't think of it."

THE END

TWO MEN IN A HURRY

By CHARLES RECOUR

IF ONE individual may be said to have made the world rocket and space conscious, that man is Willy Ley. To anyone who has read any amount of science fiction, the name of Willy Ley is familiar, for he, with unrelenting singleness of purpose, has continued for more than two decades to drive home the idea of men conquering space—and doing it in our time! In keeping with this conviction, he had the honor of doing basic work in rocket engineering during the golden days of the German Rocket Society, before the advent of the monster Hitler.

Ley is not reticent, at least in his publications, and he has described in detail in numerous articles and books the exact activities of the rocket society which led to the development of the regenerative rocket motor (cooled by its own fuel) and, eventually, to the predecessor of true space rockets, the V-2. Ley, by no means a scientist in the exact sense of the word, was

a good enough amateur engineer to make significant contributions. His major value, however, lies in the intensity with which he has attempted to persuade men to interest themselves in rockets. He has done this by taking the glamour-shell from space travel and rocketry and treating it in cold scientific terms, including economics, a technique which appeals to the peoples and governments which lay out hard cold cash!

Ley is impatient. He wants a moon rocket now—not a hundred years from now! From these efforts, from Goddard's early experiments, from the efforts of the German Rocket Society (pre-Hitler) and from the enormous advancements of the V-2 builders, including von Braun, along with the tremendous forces being used by the Army and Navy, it appears that he's going to get his wish. It's surprising how much the advancement of a cause depends upon convincing the right people there's rhyme and reason to it. Ley has done that.

TWO MEN IN A HURRY

Equally impatient to throw a rocket into space is another amateur, Arthur Clarke, a member of the British Interplanetary Society, and one imbued as firmly as Ley with the desire to get off the planet. Clarke uses the same realistic approach and, while he's quite active in science-fiction as such, he's primarily noted for the fine semi-technical and technical treatises he's done on rocketry and space travel. Clarke uses the methods of scientific analysis, as distinguished from romanticism, to convince the skeptic of the desirability and feasibility of building rocket craft. Some s-f enthusiasts deplore this factual approach, but it is much more successful in convincing the people who are really concerned. Into his factual articles and his fiction Clarke has poured science and rea-

son and sound quantities in an effort to arouse the technicians from their lethargy. The arrival of rockets into space will be due in no small measure to the work of Clarke.

Clarke and Ley represent an almost obsolete species in our highly technical civilization—the fanatics—who fight with every ounce of their ability to carry a technical innovation across. For some reason their forceful approach has been necessary to convince the boys who play with rockets. The history of science is full of their type, and many great advances have been made because of their general efforts. Keep it up boys! We want to get at least one rocket to the Moon—then space travel will follow automatically. That's all it will take—just one shot!



STEP INTO SPACE!

By LEO LEWIN

ANY DISCUSSION of Lunar or interplanetary rockets is likely to be highly theoretical, loaded with ifs, ands and buts. But that attitude toward rockets is changing rapidly especially in light of the miracle of the V-2 and more recently the *Viking* and the *Neptune*, (these latter are Navy experimental rockets). The genesis and habitat of the rocket is slowly shifting; first it was in the hands of the visionary science-fictioneer; then it came to the attention of the "long-hairs", the theoretical scientists; and finally it has come into the hands of the cold-blooded practical engineer who subordinates thinking to doing!

How well this change is demonstrated can be seen when considering the comments of the leading engineers in the field. Thus Bergen, chief engineer of the Martin aircraft plant (which has a huge part of the Navy's experimental rocket program) says that the *Viking*, a test rocket a little smaller than the V-2, is unquestionably the forerunner of spatial rockets. If its present initial speed is shoved up by a factor of four, Man will be out in space! This announcement is not startling to old hands at the game, but coming from an engineer it shows how far theory has gone into fact.

Bergen's plans call for the development of a rocket capable of attaining a height of at least four or five hundred miles—certainly a reasonable and conservative al-

titude—for the express purpose of making a small satellite to encircle the Earth. This satellite-rocket idea is old hat too, but recall that it is being considered by engineers, not idealists! Its closeness to reality is pleasant—and chilling—to contemplate. Bergen sees the satellite rocket with two functions. Its peacetime use would be as a television relay point through which half the globe could have a given program, a few more satellites would mean blanket coverage of the Earth with sight and sound.

Bergen also sees the wartime uses of the satellite—to which at present the peacetime uses would play second fiddle—that is, as an atomic bomber of infinite potentialities. Repetition—these views are old stuff to dyed-in-the-wool s-f readers, writers and fans. Imagine how startling they must be to those not fortunate enough to have long since considered these ideas now emanating from hard-headed technicians!

Inter-spatial rocketry at present seems to be standing in the same place television stood ten or fifteen years ago, in sort of an "it's-around-the-corner" vacuum. And just as suddenly and as rapidly as television blossomed into adulthood full-blown, so will rocketry and Lunar flight engulf us. The drawing boards and slide rules are giving way to the machine shop and the foundry. The rockets are on their way!



The CLUB HOUSE

Where science fiction fan clubs get together.

ONE SOUR note this month, and we might as well get it off our chest and go on to more pleasant things. It's probably inevitable that in any large facet of humanity something comes up to spoil a generally pleasant picture. Fan editors and writers for the most part show a good sense of proportion and possess a high sense of responsibility. Perhaps none of them have actually thought that they might do harm to all the others if they chose to step out of bounds. But the fact remains that it does happen. Now that we've prefaced this with enough generalities we'll get down to cases.

Fanvariety, published and edited by W. Max Keasler, whose address will not be given here this time, was read by Ziff-Davis officials, who found it to contain a drawing by Ray Nelson that by any standards could only be classed as lewd. It also ran an article by John Davis that was calculated to create the emotion of plain disgust, to put it mildly.

Now, I am saying that no fan editor will be subjected to unjust censorship. I want you to know that this one issue of *Fanvariety* came very close to causing the issuance of an order permanently ending the appearance of the CLUB HOUSE in *Amazing Stories*. In all probability Max Keasler, Ray Nelson, and John Davis didn't have the slightest idea such a thing would happen. Neither did I. In all the time I've conducted this department I've only refused to review one fanzine for lewdness.

With the exception of that one-page article and an illustration covering an eighth of a page, *Fanvariety* was okay. So in the future, guys and gals, please be aware that you do have some responsibility for what goes into your fanzine. Responsibility toward all of fandom. Because any one of you could conceivably ruin things for all the others.

Now then, where was I before my equanimity was jarred? Oh yes. I was watching a couple of ants. You know, writing science fiction as I do, I've gained a sort of understanding of other-than-human creatures. Bug-eyed monsters, alien creatures, and alien logics have been my companions so much that I can feel a sympathy toward them, an ability to capture alien viewpoints.

So I was watching these two ants with the same attempt to understand them that I would a child or a horse or a dog. They

didn't seem to have any purpose in their wanderings over the rug. They kept about an inch apart, and even when they passed within an eighth of an inch of each other they didn't seem aware of it. But after a while I realized that the second ant was following every vagary of the trail of the first ant. The conclusion was inescapable that he was following the other by the sense of smell. Tracking him. But what was the first ant doing?

He seemed to be just wandering. No purpose at all.

I was eating a sandwich. I took a bit of meat from it and dropped it on the rug. After a few minutes one of the ants came to it. He explored it, seeming to estimate its size. Then he wandered away and began his apparently senseless wandering again. But his wandering began to look an awful lot like a bloodhound searching for a spoor. I came to the conclusion that he was trying to backtrack his own trail by the sense of smell.

It took him ten minutes to get to the edge of the rug. Suddenly he started going in almost a straight line toward the baseboard. He reached it and went under it and was gone. Meanwhile the other ant was doing about the same things the first one had.

Five minutes went by. Then out from the baseboard came one ant, then two, then a dozen. And in two minutes there was a long line of ants heading toward that chunk of meat on the rug.

I went down in the basement and searched, and found them coming along a joist from an opening in the outside wall of the house. I went outside and found their nest in a bed of flowers.

The entire pattern became clear. Those first two ants had been scouts. Perhaps there were hundreds of scouts aimlessly exploring in every direction from the nest. When one found a large cache of food he went to the nest. Maybe he rubbed the food on him so the others could smell it. Maybe he told them in some way. But he quite definitely brought them to the meat.

Interesting? The level of society of some human tribes on this Earth is actually lower. And some day we may land on a planet and find it populated with creatures our size whose behavior is as easy to understand as that of those ants. And we may be wise to sit down and watch. And try to understand.

The thing that fascinated me about it was that here were some creatures far removed from the human, whose actions were practical and sensible and could be understood by us. It was the job of the scout ant to wander aimlessly until he found food, then return to the nest and get a large force to come to get it. His eyes were apparently of little use to him, but he used the sense of smell to guide him, while in his minute brain rode sensible purpose and the know-how of his daily task. That, to me, made him human.

* * *

Michael Forese, 1537 White Plains Road, Bronx 60, N. Y., writes asking if the fanzines listed in the April 1950 issue of *Amazing Stories* are still available. Fanzines are in general unpredictable. Often a fanzine reviewed in the issue on the stands is no longer available for some reason. The fan editor got tired of publishing, ran out of money, or decided there weren't enough subscribers to make it worth while. In general if you become interested in obtaining a copy of a fanzine reviewed here you should send for it right away, because almost three months on the average lapse between the time I get a fanzine for review and that review appears in the magazine on the stands.

* * *

Charles Lee Riddle, editor of PEON, writes me that Mrs. Riddle just presented him with his third son somewhere around June 9th. Congratulations, Lee! He also comments on my recent editorial guaranteeing you readers your money's worth when you send for a fanzine. He says that anyone who buys PEON and asks me for a refund will get the refund from him. That's fair enough.

Another thing he says that pleases me very much is that, "I've had reviews of PEON appearing in *Startling* and *Super-Science*, and drew no response to note; but your little review drew from 30 to 40 requests for copies and netted me around 18 subs so far. So, thanks a lot."

I don't know how to say what I feel about something like that. It's more than just 18 subscriptions. In my mind's eye I see each of you readers going to the magazine stand and buying your copy of *Amazing Stories*. You read the stories and enjoy them. But you also turn to the CLUB HOUSE which is the door to contacts with others that enjoy the unlimited horizons of science-fiction. Through this column a lot of you find one another and find a means of expressing yourselves in the varied activities of fandom.

Charles Lee Riddle, PN1, USN, Fleet All Weather Training Unit Pacific, c/o Fleet Post Office, San Francisco, Calif., lives in Honolulu with his family. His fanzine is

his hobby. Through it he gains many friends, and through his fanzine many amateur and even pro writers find an outlet for their short articles and stories. Also now he's including a letter column, with a prize of two dollars going to the best letter in each issue. It's fifteen cents a copy, or if you just want a sample copy and ask for one you can get it free.

Lee has a new assistant editor. A sailor by the name of Gene Hunter. And he has articles coming up by Tony Boucher, J. Francis McComas, D. H. Keller, and many others.

Lee has a nice hobby, and has a nice circle of friends through his hobby. That's the kind of thing that could be spoiled by some irresponsible "fan" thinking it funny to be lewd in print.

* * *

COSMAG: 10c; Ian Macauley, 57 E. Park Lane, Atlanta, Ga., with associate editors Dewey Scarborough and Henry Renhardt. Issue No. 3. A nice generalzine "running whole horse on features and sandwiching in a couple of short stories" with "our favorite part of the whole mag: Th' Ink Spot, where you fen conglomerate with your sayings," to lift quotes from "Out of the Void" by its editor.

You've read stories of the type where future historians misunderstand our present times. Lee Hoffman has one of that type in "Excerpt" in this issue that is screamingly funny.

One thing about COSMAG is that every page has a humorous cartoon on it. The Satevepost sells me on that point alone, and some of the cartoons in this zine are every bit as good. The cover illo by Mac is excellent. It illustrates the interior story, "The Jovians", by J. Lynn Burge.

* * *

OUTLANDER: 15c; Official organ of the Outlander Society of South Gate. Rick Sneary, 2962 Santa Ana St., South Gate, Calif.. Stan Woolston, Editor. The slogan of the Outlanders is "South Gate in '58," which means that they hope fandom will vote South Gate as the site for the 1958 World Science Fiction Convention, and are plugging it every year so as to be sure to get it at that time.

This zine comes out irregularly, and its contents are just what the Outlanders have fun in writing. Some serious and some not so serious discussions of various subjects of current interest. Knowing most of the Outlanders personally, when I read their zine it's just like they were talking and I was listening. It may not affect you that way, but you'll find every word interesting, and some unusual slants on usual things.

* * *

ARC LIGHT: 20c; William and Dorothy Swygard, 1370 N. W. 86th St., Miami, Fla.. This doesn't seem to be a fanzine at all, but a pamphlet on Dianetics. I don't know why I include it in the reviews this time unless it's because it's the only thing I've seen connected with that expensive subject that sells for only 20c—and my guarantee of money's worth doesn't apply even to this.

Did you know that "it is an established fact that our psychosomatic ills are caused by and controlled by the mind?" Or, "about 70% of all illnesses known to mankind can be classified as psychosomatic? That is, they originate in the mind and are not pathological?" Or, "The science of dianetics is capable of removing all the causes of these psychosomatic ills?" Things like that can fool you. They sound almost plausible.

I think the original appeal of dianetics to one facet of fandom was the romance of the superman. There was non-Aristotelian logic with its approach to the concept of superman in the null A pause which was supposed to iron out all subconscious mental stresses and make the mind function on one braincell harmoniously. There was Stan, the mutant superman before null A. Then along came dianetics with its superman who was called a "clear". A clear is a person who has no engrams. An engram is an element of mental frustration or aberration. Dianetics is the technique of discovering and clearing engrams out of the mental makeup.

The theory has certain basic points of value from the angle of understanding the mental makeup. It may do some good in many cases. Almost any high-sounding technique does. It captures the fancy of the patient and the patient plays along, enthralled by it all.

But what I and a good many quite sensible people I know would like to see done is for L. Ron Hubbard to pause in his training of auditors at twenty-five dollars or more per hour in group classes; to try his technique on a few people who actually have psychosomatic illnesses and publish the results of concrete cases.

If I were in possession of a cure-all that could return the hundreds of thousands of patients in mental hospitals to normalcy and a normal life I would force proof down the throats of the psychiatrists in charge of those hospitals.

JOURNAL OF SPACE FLIGHT: no price listed; Bob Friberg, 424 N. Grant St., Hinsdale, Ill.. Official organ of the Chicago Rocket Society, which is probably the most active and alive group of serious students of rocketry in the country. They've been steadily growing during the past few years. Their journal is an invaluable source of interesting and valuable facts about the subject. "Rocket Abstracts" is a compilation of brief rocketry facts picked up in

dozens of current periodicals and technical journals. And in each issue, in addition to that department and reports on the regular monthly meetings held in Roosevelt College, is at least one well thought out serious article dealing with some phase of rocketry space flight, and what we may encounter on other planets when we reach them.

In the May issue is an article on "The Evasion of Hazardous Objects in Space, Part II." In the June issue is the article "The Effect of Solid Particles in Rocket Exhausts."

* * *

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c; every two weeks; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 Thirty Second Ave., Flushing 54, N.Y.. Fandom's bi-weekly newsmagazine. The July 1st copy is the 133rd issue, which is really a record for long publication. Being in the New York area, Mr. Taurasi has contact with all the editors of prozines and books, and more often than not scoops all other fanzines on important developments. You can learn them by being a regular subscriber. Something of special interest to the readers of *Amazing Stories* is the reporting that N. Sakamoto, one of the editors of the Japanese *Amazing Stories*, is going to be in Evanston, Illinois, studying for one year at Northwestern University.

For other items of interest, well, why don't you send for a copy and see what it contains? Why should I steal the scoops Taurasi worked so hard to get for his subscribers?

* * *

FANTOPICS: 10c; Fred Hatfield, 7320 Abbott Ave., Miami Beach 41, Fla.. And I can't help saying that Hatfield's tradazine (for that's what it is) is the real McCoy. He's going to be at his mother's in New Orleans for the convention and a letter accompanies his fanzine, inviting me to make myself at home there during the convention. I'm probably not going this year, but in appreciation I'll give his zine a good review (as if I wouldn't anyway.)

Besides being a stf tradazine it is a phonograph record tradazine. So you record fiends at last have something to help you out in your collecting. Me, I have a few LP's and 45's and 78's that I especially like, to sooth my nerves while writing stf. That's as far as I go. The only real record fiend I know is Hannes Bok, who has just about everything. Bill Hamling, editor of *Imagination*, has a fairly complete collection of classics in 78's.

There are articles and fiction in this zine, on stf and all phases of music in records. I think it's going to fill a real need. Here it is. Send for it.

* * *

THE EXPLORER: 10c; Edward Noble, Box 49, Girard, Penna.; official publication

of the International Science Fiction Correspondence Club which seems to be getting more popular all the time. In a letter Ed sent with his zine he says, "The new members and subbers outnumber those whose interest has been mainly curiosity, but the grand sensation is when renewals roll in. 'Tis a sign that the zine is read and liked by quite a few. It makes the time spent seem more like fun instead of a job." And if you read that quote over again you will discover that here is a boy who knows how to express himself. He has summed up the reason why fans publish fanzines and what keeps them going.

You'll find the pages of the *Explorer* equally interesting. Short stories, articles, reviews, and just about everything that goes into a fanzine, including one brief page concerning club details. And we think you'd like the e.z.z. too.

In *Explorer's* fanzine review section is something that makes me feel better about having to take on the unpleasant task of blasting fanvariety. It says of that zine, "...a couple of the commentators forgot there are certain Anglo-Saxonisms that don't look good even on restroom walls..." He also agrees that otherwise fanvariety is a good fanzine. Why the heck can't Max Keasler realize that flagrant violation of good taste in his zine can reflect on all of fandom? In trying to be "funny" his fanvariety landed with all the grace of a bull in a china shop in the Ziff-Davis offices.

With the *Explorer* came a bulletin of the Cleveland stf Society which gives the locations and meeting places of four stf groups. They are the ones in Canton, Ohio, Cincinnati, Cleveland Ohio, and Columbus Ohio. Contact Ray Schaffer Jr., 122 Wise St., North Canton Ohio, or Don Ford, 129 Maple Ave, Sharonville (for the Cincy group), or Stephen F. Schultheis, 238 Trumbull Ave. S.E., Warren Ohio (phone Warren 3-6403, and that's for the Cleveland group), or Stan Skirvin (phone Walnut 1335) 389 King Ave., Columbus. There are a lot of active fans in Ohio. They have big get-togethers. Mari and I spent several days in that area last fall visiting with the friends I had made a year previously when the big stf convention was held in Cincinnati.

If you're a new reader of *Amazing Stories* and have been wondering where to dip into fandom first, why not send for *EXPLORER*. You won't find a nicer spot to dive in. The water's warm—with friendliness and welcome.

IMAGINATIVE COLLECTOR: 15c; 2/25c; Russell K. Watkins, 203 E. Wampum Ave., Louisville 9, Ky., combined with *Dawn*, the letterzine. An interesting fantasy illo appears on the cover. It's by Ken Wilcox, who lives in Santa Cruz, California.

I always enjoy reading this zine because it's controversial. I read the articles and

sense the fishing of their authors for a nice intellectual argument with someone who disagrees with them, and quite often—bang—someone takes the hook, and there's some real arguing. Its editor himself is conducting a "clean up fandom" campaign which is drawing fire in the letter department (which I suspect is the main reason he started his campaign.)

"A Look Around" by Edward Wood is an analysis of fandom that has baited hooks dangling in the water off the pier. More fun...

* * *

THE CENTAURIAN: 15c; Bob Farnham, 104 Mountain View Drive, Dalton Georgia. Organ of a fanclub by the same name which seems to be doing all right at present. K. Martin Carlson is co-editor. Front cover illo by Dea. Inside is a page of photos that look like they came from Walt Dunkelburger's old fanzine. Wonder what Walt's doing now?

Most interesting article continues to be Eva Firestone's feature on "Science Tidbits of Interest." Just one such item she mentions is about Tungsten wire so fine that one pound would make a wire 950 miles long.

Under "Hello!" a new fan, Carl Lawrence introduces himself to the readers of the zine and presents his views on stf. A thing like that is always interesting. It makes you feel you know the guy.

There're some poems, short stories and articles. A nice well rounded zine for a nice group of fans called the Centaurians. A letter from Bob accompanying his zine says that he has sold some of his writings. More power to you, Bob.

* * *

SOL: 10c; Dave Ish, 914 Hammond Road, Ridgewood, N.J.. Last spring the Fan-Vets held an auction in Flushing, N.Y.. One of the items auctioned off was a manuscript of a story I wrote which had appeared in *Amazing*. Dave bid on it and got it. He sent the front sheet of the manuscript to me to get my autograph on it. In a facetious mood I wrote him a tall tail of how I got started in writing. He asked if he could put it in his fanzine. I said okay, and it's in this issue of SOL.

Bob Silverberg has a short story, "The Drowning Planet". "The Dark Curse" by Edward Davis is the other story. Articles and regular features fill out the issue. A first issue, by the way.

So Dave has begun the long trail of fanzine publishing. It will bring him friends and work, and if he enjoys it he'll keep on. All fanzines begin the same way. Some of them never publish a second issue. Others have been appearing regularly for years.

The value of the CLUB HOUSE to these fanzines is that any fan who starts one can send it to me for review and be sure of a fair number of fans writing him for a

copy. From that number come the ones who buy more and strike up an acquaintance with him. It's that simple. I hope we can always keep it that simple.

FANTASY ADVERTISER: June; 15c; bi-monthly, 1745 Kenneth Road, Glendale 1, Calif. One of the oldtimers in the fanzine field, with a large circulation, and devoted mainly to ads of wants and for sales of everything of interest to stf fans. Some of the best buys of fantasy are from professional bookstores, and because of F A circulation it gets some of these ads.

In addition there are some high quality articles of interest to stf enthusiasts and collectors. Arthur J. Cox has the lead article this issue, "A Short Essay on Frank Belknap Long", stf author.

If you want books, back issue prozines, or if you want to sell such things, F A is your medium.

QUANDRY: No. 12; 10c; Lee Hoffman, 101 Wagner St., Savannah, Georgia. This zine is settling down into a nice groove of good material and good mimeography. Its contents page carries the names of some of the best of the fan writers. Walter Willis conducts a feature department called, "The Harp That Once or Twice". Wonder what that means. Could it be a pun, like the racehorse that wuns or twies? At any rate Walt wuns a regular column, or twies to. He takes some cracks at N3F which Eva Firestone takes him to task over. But isn't the object of taking cracks at things to get a rise out of someone? Of course it is.

Richard Elsberry in "Trends" analyzes the changes in favorite fan, author, prozine, etc., over the years.

Announcement is made that a super issue is coming up about the time you read this review. It will cost a quarter and will have no less than seventy pages. A thing like that is a monumental task for any fan. Some have done it before. Joe Kennedy, Lilith Lorraine, Pat Eaton, Gregg Calkins, Astra Zimmer (Bradley), Fred Hatfield, and many others will author the contents.

TRILOBITE: 5c; M. McNeil, 2010 McCandlon, Houston, Texas. A prize contest gets under way in this issue. There's an illo of some strange-looking things that might be spaceships. All you have to do is write a short story around the illo, and the best one will win a copy of "Porcelain Magician".

This fanzine is a nice nickel's worth. Not so ambitious that it snows the editor under with after-school work, and just enough to give him some fun, and you some enjoyment when you read it.

SCIENCE FICTION DIGEST: first issue; 20c; free to overseas fans; Henry W. Burwell, 459 Sterling St. N.E., Atlanta, Ga. The title of this zine gives the nature of its contents. It plans to give digests of best fan writings that appear in all the various fanzines. A really worthy idea. There are no less than fifteen different fanzines represented in the list this time. The "Sacred Writings of Roscoe," by Art Rapp. That's one of my favorite bits of literature, and it should be immortalized in book form. Roscoe is an invisible Beaver.

You late comers to fandom can get acquainted with the best of past fan fiction and articles by getting this digestzine.

That's all the fanzines for this time. As I write this it's close to the end of July. You'll be reading it in September or October. The World Science Fiction Convention at New Orleans will be past history.

At the Nolacon they will have voted on the site for the next convention. My prediction is that it will be in Detroit. The Detroiters almost got it last time, and they've been plugging for it every year.

But wherever it is to be held, it is to my mind the expression of something peculiar to the part of the world that is free to think as it chooses. Fantasy and Science Fiction are products of an age in which people can let their minds go in free flight to any corner of the world of imagination and speculation that they care to. In ages past, even in this country in the last century, much of modern stf would have been censored because it violated tradition or walked on the toes of this or that belief.

We live in a never-never land between the age of rigid beliefs that were mostly mistaken, and the age of space travel. A hundred years from now stories about the planets will be restricted by factual knowledge of those worlds. Just as today *Gulliver's Travels* is a pure fantasy whose lure of possible truth is negated by factual knowledge of the Earth, so also in the next century much of the science fiction of today will be pure fantasy of the same type.

A century from now spaceships will rise from the Earth on a pillar of atomic fire, to soar through the millions of miles of space to the sister planets. What they will find there no one knows. Strange races? More probably nothing but sand and bleak landscape unsoftened by the touch of life, for even on our own planet life retreats from areas when Mother Nature grows less kind to her most fragile of creations.

But, financed by governments, our scouts will systematically explore the wastelands of the Solar System, then, when they find something, speed back to Earth to tell us, and man will go over the trail they blazed, to found new civilizations on new worlds, or bring back the wealth of minerals or other riches discovered there.

Because, you see, it's the way of humans to do that. Humans and ants.

MAN-MADE METEOR!

● ● ● By TOM LYNCH

IN NO other entertaining and educational structure can one find so exact a simulation of nature as is to be found in a planetarium. The average planetarium is an optical miracle, its projector capable of duplicating, on its hemispherical dome, almost any astronomical occurrence, from the rotating of the seasons to the landing of a rocket on the Moon flashed upon the dome in almost absolute darkness, the astral effects are uncannily real—so real that often, when the projector has been spun rapidly, the observer feels dizzy, as though the sky outside had actually whirled and spun.

The most recent addition to planetarium

equipment is a clever optico-mechanical apparatus which duplicates the behavior of shooting stars and meteorites. The results are so realistic that one is inclined to shrink under the bombardment of these celestial visitors. It is as though the heavens were raining fire.

The tremendous popular interest in astronomy has been partly stimulated by the general interest in science-fiction which has grown so in the last decade. The "man on the street" is fully aware now that conquering space is only a matter of time and he wants to know all about where he's going!

* * *

BUILD YOUR HOUSE OF DUST!

By RALPH COX

"AS THE rocket settled on its tail fires slowly toward Lunaport, Mark could not refrain from studying, with a mixed blend of awe and pride, the smooth hemispherical bubble of glassite that enveloped the city, retaining its air and permitting the little city to look like a jewel set in the course matrix of Lunar pumice. Lunaport was Man's master engineering feat. Mark felt the rocket shudder gently as it touched the burnt pumice of the landing field. In minutes the shuttle cars would plant him within the dome through the airlock—it was good to be back..."

Unfortunately "the hemispherical bubble of glassite" appears to be considerably remote in terms of practical engineering, and when cities are planted on the Moon, their construction materials will undoubtedly be of considerably simpler and humbler origin and design. Consider the problem confronting the first colonizers of the Moon; we say "colonizers" as distinct from "explorers," for the initial landing on the Moon will require no permanent structures; the rocket itself will suffice as a habitation. But after the first flights, permanent settlements will be built—and the question is—of what will they be built?

With rocketry as rudimentary as it will be at first, every pound of material from Earth will be worth its weight in gold. Steel girders and loads of cement can't be "trucked" up the two-hundred and forty thousand mile gravitational potential that separates Tellus from Luna. Even light metals and aluminum will have to go Lunarward as machines and equipment rather than structural material.

That means, then, that the buildings on the Moon will have to be made of materials found on the Moon! The problem is: what building materials are available? Fortunately, the right answer seems to come up. It is believed to be almost a certainty that the surface is covered with a layer of pumice dust, a dry powdery substance, to a depth we don't know, perhaps six inches, perhaps six feet. This pumice dust might be used as a structural material in this way.

Either the rocket itself or a simple pressurized cabin or hut will serve to start with. In here using the pumice dust and a liquid cement of some sort, perfectly good bricks or building blocks could be assembled on a quantity basis. These could then be used to construct a building. The joints and cracks could easily be plugged with various cements and prefabricated airlocks could be attached to the buildings. In this way, a sizable settlement of permanent structures could be assembled.

The over-all picture of such a camp or city wouldn't be pretty. No "shining, glistening domes", no "hemispheres of glassite"; just dirty old pumice structures, chinks plugged to pressurize them, would form the basis of "Lunaport." This realistic view has a very good chance of being the one that someday we'll actually see. The time will come when the price gravity exacts from people who defy it won't mean anything—the age of atomic rockets—but until that time, precious rocket fuel will require that use be made of every offered advantage. When the colonizers go out to Mars and Venus, similarly will they take advantage of the native resources—that's only good sense!



SCIENCE FICTION

BOOKCASE

This massive volume, reissued and vastly enlarged, is becoming to science fiction what H.G. Mencken's monumental and frequently re-issued American Slang dictionary is to philologists or Frank Mencke's Encyclopedia of Sports is to stadium statisticians.

It opens with the linking of Ancient Man's dream of flying to the stars with the discovery of rocket power (placed by Mr. Ley in approximately 3,000 B.C.), moves right on through legend, demi-legend, fable and history to the present day. Rockets, of course, have been put by mankind to an infinity of uses and the author covers all known such employments, guesses shrewdly at others.

But he is not held in bounds by the wall of the here and now, moves right ahead into the future with a fascinating and highly technical forecast of the immediate future where, as the title implies, rockets and other propulsive items are joined to space travel.

This is a tremendous job, possibly a vastly important one, beautifully printed, documented, diagrammed and illustrated. However, those who expect another Ley-Bonestell Conquest of Space are in for a surprise. Where Conquest had many Bonestells and

only one Ley (the astronomer), Rockets has many Leys (historian, mathematician, prophet, etc.) and only one Bonestell (on its cover). In this instance, we feel, a wise reversal.

FAR BOUNDARIES, edited by Augst Derleth Pellegrini & Cudahy, New York (\$2.95).

In this month's anthology the science fantasy sage of Sauk City, Wisconsin, has undertaken, with characteristic daring, a selective study of stf from its New Orleans or Jelly Roll Morton days to its post-Bop or newest "progressive" era.

And while he has dug up some utterly lost items from a long-faded past—many of surpassing interest—and included fine examples by such inevitable latter day practitioners as Ray Bradbury, Murray Leinster and Nelson Bond, we do not feel that the volume is entirely successful. It suffers from the too-common failing of anthologies with a purpose—the necessity of picking the tales included not only on their own merits as stories but also to suit the announced aim of the volume.

Consequently the anthology is more remarkable for the unevenness of its contents than for its theme. But it comes close to the "must" category

for the stf collector, if only on the novelty and scholarship shown in the selection of its early-portion primitives.

THE WEAPON SHOPS OF ISHER by A.E. van Vogt, Greenberg, New York (\$2.75).

The second to our knowledge of the Weapon Shop series to find itself in hard covers and, to our way of thinking, far better than its predecessor. In typical van Vogt manner it contains so many flights into logic of various sorts, so many social and mechanical concepts, such an intricate interweaving of short scenes (we have been informed, rightly or otherwise, that vV, on his wife's advice, seldom if ever allows a scene to go over 800 words) as to defy any sort of plot summary.

Suffice it to say that it involves a future world of rigid social castes in which a matriarchal imperialism is balanced uneasily by a physically impervious society dedicated to the prospect of social anarchy. Into a crisis between these two bizarre elements is projected via a sort of time pendulum an overadventurous present-day reporter, whose existence threatens to blow the Isher-world to smithereens. Into this mess is tossed a naive young farmhand with an eidetic (perfect) memory and he... If this sounds complex it is—but van Vogt without complexities would be like lettuce without dressing. Furthermore, in its own rather quaint way, it makes not only sense but entertainment.

SEETEE SHIP by Will Stewart, Gnome Press, New York \$2.75).

A follow-up (or mayhap a predecessor, we could not decide which) to the same author's Seetee Shock published last year, this volume again deals with the struggle to develop and obtain control of the deadly CT or contra-ter-

rene matter. Actually the stuff is completely lethal to any "normal" matter and vice versa, so the problem is to find some way to keep the force of the mutual annihilation under control and put it to useful purposes.

The characters and story Mr. Stewart has created around this rather interesting problem are pretty much the stuff of stereotyped space-opera—with the noble asteroid pioneers battling the big-planet combines not only for a fair shake economically, but also to prevent themselves from being blown to nothing by seetee stuff among the debris of their native orbit.

The hero is a stalwart son of a pioneer, the heroine, resolutely confused daughter of the biggest of the combines. The one deviation from the normal of such stencils is the presence of a highly sympathetic villain, who is actually far more engaging than hero and heroine. Author has an annoying habit of jumping protagonists at the drop of a meteor (possibly a holdover from his Jack Williamson days) but the story is generally swift, fast, sure and at least moderately exciting.

ROGUE QUEEN by L. Sprague de Camp, Doubleday, New York (\$2.75).

One of the most individual, controversial and erudite talents science fantasy has yet developed here undertakes in a bit of extremely inhibited satire to tell us not only all about the bees (if not the birds) but how human beings—or at least humanoids—would act if they lived in a hive.

Given an alien-planet setting with a gang of Earthly space travelers arriving to create an Aldous-Huxley-type mess, it is a hell of a lot of fun—if not precisely science fiction. But then, come to think of it, what is? If you care for de Camp a tenth as much as we, you'll be making tracks for the bookstore.

The Reader's FORUM



BY ROG PHILLIPS

STORY VERSUS ILLUSTRATION

Dear Sir:

At last I am settling down to do something I have wished to do for a long time. For a few years now I have been a regular reader of science fiction. Unfortunately, the American magazines are received here rather late, the copy I have now containing the story "Vanguard of the Doomed".

I read AMAZING STORIES for entertainment, but think that most of the stories lack the essential thing that turns fiction into science fiction—that is, science. I don't want stories that would read like scientific theories, but most of your authors, when they come to a scientific point in a story, seem to lack the descriptive power which made H. G. Wells possibly the greatest of them all. A writer of today who managed this very well was John Russell Fearn's masterpiece "Livers of Time".

To get back to your magazine, "Vanguard of the Doomed" was nothing special. "The Man Who Forgot" was a rather worn idea, but neatly handled. Apart from "The Way of a Weeb", which was fair, the rest are not worth a mention. Altogether an issue far below standard. Still, there is no doubt your magazines are still the best on the market, though with not such a lead as they had.

One more point, it seems a pity that science-fiction writers do not seem able to handle the romantic angle very well. It is all so amateurish, the way it is handled. They could always solve this problem by leaving romance out of the story altogether. These of course are only my views and I would be interested to hear any Americans' views on the points I have mentioned.

It seems to me, also, that the majority of people whose letters are published are more interested in the illustrations than the stories.

L/CPL Bran McMahon, 22386960
16 Coy. R. A. O. C., A. S. D.
Kirtle Bridge Near Lockerbie
Dumfries-shire, Scotland

We don't think there's anything wrong

with the way our writers handle the romantic angle. One must remember that, for the most part, the lone interest in these stories is sublimated in favor of the science fiction. We think that writers like Rog Phillips, Paul Fairman, Lawrence Chandler, Milton Lesser—to name a few—can certainly hold their own when it comes to writing romance into their science-fiction stories.

All right, readers—what's your answer to Corporal McMahon.Ed.

SCIENCE FICTION A LA VICTORIAN AGE

Dear Mr. Browne:

Having finally recovered from the shock of having my letter to you printed, missing a couple of issues because of traveling hither and yon, and, finally, reading the latest "Reader's Forum", I am back in the fold again continuing where I left off—sounding off. The "shock" I referred to was definitely not at seeing a "first letter" printed; there was none in that. It was just the fact that I had written that letter with no thought or expectation whatever of its ever being published, or even that its merits were that high. You can imagine my surprise and pleasure.

I don't know whether you print some letters just to get a "rise" out of the usually silent readers or not, but reading a couple of letters in the last part of the Forum has brought me back in full cry.

Item 1: Are people going to enjoy stories wherein the characters act like Victorian totem poles? Profanity!! My goodness gracious, are children actually reading such language? Dear me, I'm practically speechless. Ha! Anywhere the children go, whether it is on the way to school, to a baseball park, or at home, they are going to hear some kind of profanity. When a father smashes his finger with a hammer and all he says is "Ouch", I'll have heart failure. At the baseball park, when an umpire makes a decision that doesn't set well with the spectators, I suppose they will say to him, "Oh, you bad man." That will be the day. I would suggest that some people come out of their soundproof enclosures and discover

what the world is like today before they get left behind in the rush—if they haven't been already.

Item 2: I am diving into this bare-lady discussion head first, I think. Anyway, to my distress and exasperation, I find two ladies writing from California putting thumbs down on the girl-covers. Being a Los Angelesite myself, this seems like treachery, since it seems they would be anti-beach apparel also. In case they haven't been to the beach lately, they are due for a big surprise. I would bet anyone 2-1 that the damsels on your covers actually wear almost twice as much clothing as the little ladies on the beach parade around in.

As for Mr. Mink, I believe he has already risked setting a good example, and lost. How many children, when they start taking physiology, sit there calmly and composedly? Very few. How many let out with snickers, giggles and blushes? Approximately 99 percent. What I am trying to say is that the parents who do such things as Mr. Mink says he does, are preparing a way for their children that will be set with many obstacles. Those children will have conflicting emotions, feel shameful about something in which there should be no shame.

They see their parents underhandedly disposing of, or hiding, a picture showing a girl in bra and shorts. What do they think? What would you think! Anyone with common sense could see that the impression they received would be anything but good. These impressions they carry into their adult life, and often completely through it. What kind of good example is it when the parents thoughtfully and deliberately direct their children's minds into channels that do more harm than good?

They have shame and bewilderment forced upon them, and up grow mountains from the molehills. Their attention is focused on a subject with which they are not ready to cope. Whose fault? The Mr. and Mrs. John Henrys of the world, primarily.

If you have plowed through this missive thus far, I must apologize for my long-windedness. Being a quiet type, this opportunity for cutting loose rather relieves the pressure. It would seem that I am anything but quiet with a pen. Nevertheless, I think I know what I am talking about, seeing that at the ripe old age of 21 I still have qualms about wearing bathing suits. T'aint no fun.

To make a long story short, I'm sorry to say I did not enjoy the June issue as much as the previous four issues of 1951. Can't say anything about the January issue. Missed it on the sands. But you have a good batting average so far.

Mrs. John R. Campbell, Jr.
Route 1, Box 216
Greenville, Mississippi

We suggest you forget your qualms, Mrs. C., and get on out on that beautiful beach. It's fun. . . .Ed.

WANTED—PRE-1945 ISSUES

Dear Editor:

This happens to be my first letter to AMAZING STORIES. I hope to see it in print because of a favor I am going to ask later. I have been reading AMAZING STORIES since I got out of the Army in 1945. The first mag I picked up was AMAZING STORIES. I had never read any science fiction before. Now I read everything that even resembles science fiction.

I am a disabled war veteran and have scads of time to read. I have just finished reading "We the Machine" by Gerald Vance. What a great story!

Say, how about coming out with a companion mag reprinting some of the book-length novels of the past. I am sure most readers would be in favor.

The other day I picked up in an old junk store an old 1929 copy of AMAZING STORIES featuring "After Ten Thousand Years". The story was great. Just made my hair stand up. I know there must be hundreds of others just as fine in the old copies of AMAZING STORIES. Why don't you reprint them?

May I plead with some good reader to sell me some back issues of AMAZING STORIES before 1945. Just any old stray copy I will buy at a fair price.

Thank you.

Alton Maddox
Garner, Texas
Route 1

INTO THE TRASH CAN?

Dear Ed:

Just finished two darn good publications, AS and FA. Also read a Ziff-Davis slick—POPULAR PHOTOGRAPHY.

I believe it was about 1925 when I picked up a now unrecalable magazine wherein the tale I became interested in told of a guy who messed with a radio hookup and accidentally found himself in a land of ants who had the added faculty of reasoning. They invented him a head set so he could understand them. There were also for the feminine interest, Kewpies, with wings, yet. Incapable of flight, however if I recall that part of it. Anyway, he had a big time of it, and finally got around to arranging transportation home (matter transmission probably) and destroyed his set just in time to keep the ant population from using the same route. They (in the other joint) had a mechanical carriage called a kerrakool ool, I seem to recall. That far enough back for you? Or does anyone now present recall that tale?

About story ratings and authors: I don't give a . . . about who writes the stories. That doesn't make it any better than it would if he used a Royal or an Underwood typewriter . . . or writ it by hand. I read the story, enjoy it or not as the case may be, and stand around waiting for the next

issue to be published—just like all the rest of your readers. NOBODY buys our perfectly good mag, says, "Oh, Barnes wrote the lead—phooey", and throws the ish in the trash can. They do just like I do: read it from cover to cover, get technical and write a few ill-chosen words about it. We all read for relaxation, for the pleasure we get out of reading these stories.

Wilbur J. Barnes
McCrory, Arkansas

We're pretty sure our readers will be able to help you out on the first part of your letter, Wil.

Re your opinion of author ratings—well, we don't know. The fact remains that some authors are more popular than others. And whereas we don't think the average reader will drop the issue, unread, into the trash can because Barnes wrote the lead story—he just might buy that particular issue because his favorite writer did do the lead.

—Ed.

LET'S BE BLUNT

Dear Mr. Browne:

Just finished July issue and in answer to your request, re Vance's latest effort, "We the Machine", I should like to make the following observations.

First of all, it is a definite improvement for Vance. An improvement but not excellent and certainly not the best yarn in this excellent issue. To be blunt about it, the last few yarns by Vance have been, to my mind, very poor indeed. Frankly, I must confess I have not bothered to read his last few yarns and I considered them to be so much wasted paper. However, enough of Vance for the time being. I hope to hear more of him in the future—and all good at that!

When he starts turning out yarns comparable to "So Shall Ye Reap"—"The Star Kings"—"Masters of Sleep", etc., I shall be more than delighted to sing his praises. Mind you, I shan't mind if he continues with some more yarns comparable to "We the Machine", JUST SO LONG AS HE DOESN'T SLIP BACK TO HIS USUAL EFFORTS. The best yarn was, without a doubt "Good Luck, Columbus". This yarn had that "something" which I always call "feeling" (this is what Vance could do with). There was a depth to the yarn which really got me, and I enjoyed it much.

No. 2. "The Sky Was Filled with Light". Very neatly written and, again, this one had "feeling".

No. 3. "We the Machine".

The cover was also one of the best in a long time. Let's have more of these scientific covers, with a girl thrown in now and again, just for the hell of it!

It is with real regret that I have to place an old favorite of mine at the bottom of the list, namely, Ches Geier. What's happened to him? This was a very, very

poor yarn. He can do better than this, much better. I didn't think Ches could turn out one this bad!

That about wraps up my remarks on this issue, for what they are worth, so I'll just say cheerio for the present.

Best wishes.

Ken Smith
417 Smithdown Road
Liverpool 15, Lancashire, England

HOW MUCH IS HOAX?

Dear Sir:

On page 59, July issue, AMAZING STORIES magazine, appeared an article by one Ralph Cox which was entitled "Those Little Men", wherein Hon. Cox reflects upon the low mentality and defective vision of those persons who have reported seeing "Flying Saucers". These people are denounced (by Cox) as being subject to any form of mass hysteria usually stemming from obscure news and radio reports of sightings of strange and mysterious objects over various sections of this planet.

He apparently concludes: "Those who report flying disks, saucers, or whatever, are either, (1) insane, (2) visually defective." (Or both.)

I must assume that Mr. Cox has completed a most exhaustive study of the "Saucer" mystery, seeing as how he so learnedly propounds upon the subject. That quite a number of the saucer-sighting reports were/are from publicity hounds, etc., I accept.

Mr. Cox refers to the newspaper and radio reports concerning the so-called "little men" which were purportedly captured in Mexico a couple of years back, along with a space vessel.

At that time, I just happened to be in Laredo, Texas, on the Mexico-U. S. A. border. Immediately after the "Little Men" report hit the streets. The front page of the main paper of Laredo was filled both with photos of what was supposed to be a disk and one of the dwarfs captured, along with a photo of Laredo's mayor, police chief, etc. They were denied by the newspaper as truth, branded as a hoax.

That, of course, was only an isolated instance and not common, at least so far as I am informed, and has not one thing whatsoever to do with the over-all picture of the situation.

If there were a hundred reported attempts by publicity hunters to gain the limelight by capitalizing on the disk mystery, that wouldn't change the entire picture into an equation solvable by recognized mathematical concepts.

The following occurred in Gadsden, Alabama. In January of 1950, at 3:45 A.M. Moon full. No clouds. Very cool.

As I lay on the living room couch, I glanced out the window. I glimpsed a light, which for the moon was too bright. (Besides, the moon was off to the left of

my house out of sight from where I lay.) I hurried out on the porch. The light was moving from West to East. There was no sound at all. I have seen a number of jets and rockets in operation, and the object did not look like any that I have ever observed. The thing looked something like this:

Height: approx. 1,000 feet. Arranged in color. About 3 feet in length. Possibly was pretty high, therefore could have been extremely large compared to the way it appeared to me.

Sparks flew from the object to me. These sparks seemed to come out all the way around the "thing" at the "same" distance from the rear end. The object appeared as a chunk of iron ore does when it drops from the furnace in a semi-matter state. I woke my father, and he had about 30 seconds in which to observe.

The object continued in a mathematically straight line of flight. Did not seem to move up or down. Merely straight ahead. The speed did not, I believe, exceed 15 m. p. h. Very slow motion.

The whole observing time consumed no less than 3 minutes. I'm guessing, of course. There was a loaded camera at home, but all the films were exposed. Now, it could have been a number of things. Rocket (high altitude) or meteor. I don't know. Neither did my father.

C. A. Nelson, Jr.
2941 Grand Blvd. West
Detroit 2, Michigan

There are many phenomena for which we have no explanation. This is just one more. It could have been a rocket—a meteor—a flying saucer—or something entirely new of which we haven't even the vaguest conception.Ed.

A NEW TWIST—BLANK COVERS

Dear Mr. Browne:

Although this letter will probably wind up in the waste basket instead of in print, I would like to call to the attention of your readers who may not have seen it, an article in the June 1951 issue of **POPULAR PHOTOGRAPHY** titled, "Create Weird Pictures in the Darkroom". This gives a full explanation and examples of the technique used particularly suitable for sf and fantasy subjects.

In my estimation, "Good luck, Columbus" in the July AS was the best in several months, by reason of the fact that in theory it could happen today rather than being set 500,000 or more years in the future.

I have read quite a few different sf magazines from time to time, and AS is the only one in which I cannot remember ever having seen a story which in my opinion should have been thrown in the trash can. Many of the newer magazines in the field even have more than one in the

same issue in that category.

As far as I am concerned, Rev. Burdell's letter on the subject of covers (July) left nothing more to be said. For myself—as long as the stories stay what they are, you can even put it out with blank covers or advertisements on the cover.

W. A. R. Edgecomb FN
CGC Ivy, PO Box 810
Astoria, Oregon

HE DOESN'T UNDERSTAND

Dear Sir:

I would like to congratulate you on the September issue. You did very well in your choice of stories. There are a few things I didn't understand, though. Where did you get the title "A World He Never Made" for the Novel? It had nothing to do with the story. In my opinion that was the best story in the issue.

Although I congratulated you, I don't think the stories were as good as those in the issues in 1949-50.

I agree with others who say you should have variety in the covers and I agree with Mrs. Greene that I have found no sex-stimulating passages in AS.

Since I have so much time on my hands all the time, I would appreciate corresponding with some other enthusiasts.

Bill Annette
15842 11th Avenue So. W.
Seattle 66, Washington

It seemed to us that the theme of this story fitted perfectly a quotation from the famous poem by Housman: "...I, a stranger, and afraid

In a world I never made..."

You will remember that Stuart found himself pulled in to saving a world to which he owed no allegiance whatsoever.

.....Ed.

THANKS—"AMERICAN FRIEND"

Dear Editor:

Thank you for publishing my "appeal" letter in your August issue of "Amazing". The response of your readers has been most generous. I can only say thanks to all of them. I am now assured of reading material for a few weeks.

One of your readers who was very kind signed himself (or herself) "A. F.", which means "American Friend". This has profoundly touched me. I can't write him (or her) personally, but perhaps my thanks will reach my "American Friend" through your columns.

Grateful thanks once again.

Walter J. R. Izzard
Rugby, Warwickshire
England



NO MONUMENT SO PROUD!

By

SALEM LANE

LISTEN to me! Don't listen to your stay-at-home friends!

If you can beg, borrow or steal the thirty thousand credits it takes to make the Lunar trip, do it. I'm not working for the Lunar Corporation nor am I romantically drunk on the idea of going into space. I'm just telling you that if you had to work a lifetime to make the tourist trip to the Moon, you'd be spending your earnings well. I'll tell you another thing: as soon as they open up Mars to tourists; I'm going to make that jaunt, too, if I have to mortgage my soul. The Lunar experience is terrific; I can't imagine what the Martian one will be like. •

Going to the Moon (in spite of what the ads say) isn't exactly like taking a trip to Capri. I boarded the *Stellar I*—it's a converted chemical rocket using atomic drive—at White Sands and they put me in a cubicle with two other people and before we hit Luna that place was a wreck. They say spacemen eventually acquire immunity to nausea—we didn't! But one glance through the quartzite port at the big ball of Earth made it all worth it! Incidentally, they treat you as though they're doing you a favor by taking your money—and the truth of the matter is, they are. I didn't eat the two days it took—I couldn't have kept anything down if I'd tried. I guess my mind was occupied between thoughts of my knotty stomach and thoughts of that thirty thousand credits!

Luna City, under the surface of the Moon, is practically nothing; but endless miles of rock-walled tubes and tunnels and, barring the observatory domes, you don't see much of the Lunar surface except when they take out the daily tourist boats, which are glassite-topped space boats. But that's when you feel the grandeur of the whole thing.

They put suits on us, jammed us like sardines in these boats, treated us like recruits—and we loved every minute of it. The boats, driven by simple rockets, skimmed low over the surface and we saw an endless parade of incredible things. The barker (he was exactly that) droned on and on, yet every word was fascinating. We saw where the first guided missiles landed and scattered their plaster-of-Paris and carbon black. We saw the uranium mining concessions—not too closely, of course—but closely enough to see that the men who ran them were prouder than atomic scientists!

We saw the seas and craters. We saw the television and radio relay stations with their gigantic parabolic reflectors. Above all, we realized that we were humans beings, part and parcel of the race which has conquered space. The steps are slow—we've only just reached Mars—but things are accelerating.

To me, the most impressive sight, the single outstanding thing, was the wreck of the first manned rocket, the Luna. As you know, they haven't touched it. It lies, a crumpled heap of sheet metal, in the middle of the Sea of Dreams, unchanged and untouched—where it will lie forever. Inside are the bodies of three men, still encased in their space suits, still preserved by the vacuum, by nothingness. The antenna they rigged still points into the airless Lunar sky.



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You get chills when you realize what nerve it took to do what they did. When their air gave out they went out with sleeping pills, broadcasting technical info to the very end.

Take my advice, please. You'll never regret it. It'll be a long while before the atomic rockets make space travel like driving the family helicopter. You won't live forever. Take your thirty thousand credits—even if it is a small fortune—and make the Lunar hop. You can't do anything with the money that's worth one-tenth of what the trip is. You'll realize you're a human being and you'll be proud of it....

WHO OWNS THE MOON? By PETER DAKIN

"WHO OWNS the moon?" This academic question will soon become a hotly contested problem if the rocket boys have their way—and they will. The answer to that hypothetical question is loaded with dynamite. Upon how it is answered may depend the entire future of the Earth. It is a question laden with political and military overtones.

One s-f author, considering that ponderous question, attempted to answer it in the one way which is sane! "The Moon belongs to everyone...." That is the only way in which it should be answered despite the inevitable partisanship of the politicians.

The Moon is no one's property; no nation has claim to it, nor has any made such claim. But that is only because it seems so remote and unobtainable. Paralleling the question of ownership of the Moon is the case of the Antarctic. When that remote and icy waste was unknown, none bothered to claim it. But when exploration disclosed that it might be rich in minerals and have a certain strategic value, nations clamored for rights. Mad Hitler went so far as to fly planes over the Antarctic regions, sowing thousands of metal bars with swastikas molded into them in a bid for ownership!

When rocketry is established, by whatever nation, the claims for ownership of the Moon will be extravagantly loud and certain. And because whoever lands on the Moon and establishes a livable base has military control of the Earth, many nations will demand absolute domination. What a war that sort of thing could lead to!

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sible citizens, with an eye to the forthcoming realities, have suggested that the Moon be administered legally and politically by joint ownership of all the nations of the Earth, actual operations to be vested in those with technological capabilities. Those unable to contact the Moon will have their rights held in a sort of perpetual sacred trust. This solution is not so idealistic as it sounds. Common logic demands it. As Americans, we want to see the Moon ours; as citizens of the Earth, we want the Moon to belong to all peoples. Fortunately, it is likely that the Moon will be reached by American technology, and so we shall have, with fair and generous principles behind us, the automatic right to administer it justly.

THIS WILL SHOCK YOU!

A NEW discovery in cosmic radiation is casting a wet blanket over high-altitude flying—and possibly over any ultimate interplanetary flying. Ordinary cosmic rays apparently do not have any great effect on the human body; everyone is subjected to this bombardment everywhere on Earth without ill effect. Various radioisotope and high-altitude photographic methods have disclosed some unpleasant possibilities, however, possibilities which begin to occur at above twenty miles.

So far as is known, cosmic rays are essentially atoms of various materials coming in toward the Earth—from where, only God knows—at tremendous speeds. When these atoms strike molecules of air or other substances, they shatter into fragments which still continue at high speeds. These fragments really are the cosmic rays with which we are familiar. Before the shattering occurs, however, the cosmic rays have energies measured in *trillions* of electron volts and, if the particles are the cores of iron atoms and other heavy materials, as it has been discovered they frequently are, the shattering effect they produce is devastating. Imagine such cosmic rays penetrating the human body!

Obviously, if a rocket passes through such a region for only a short time, no harm will be done. But if space is laden with such cosmic radiation, it is conceivable that no human beings could endure much of it. Right now strenuous efforts are being made by the cosmic-ray researchers to measure this intensity. Screening a rocket ship from such particles seems to be impossible, at least with any material substances. What the solution will be is hard to guess. The greatest hope lies in the chance that the rays may be merely localized and not distributed uniformly, with such trillion-volt energies, through all interplanetary space.

—L. A. Burt



"TOUGH AS NAILS"

THEY SAY THE future is molded in the foundries and metallurgical laboratories. They speak of this age as the "Age of Steel" and promise that the future will be the "Age of Titanium." We can admit and understand this when we recall what has happened in the last few decades. Twenty years ago aluminum was merging from the "pot and pan" stage to its present structural applications, and magnesium changed from "the sparkler metal" to its present use in vehicles of all kind. The same trend is evidenced for Titanium, the miracle metal, stronger than steel, almost as light as aluminum and as corrosion-resistant as stainless steel!

But it is not the metals themselves which are miraculous but rather their combinations and alloys, with their subsequent heat treatments. All of theoretical science is concentrating on a study of the true nature of metal structure—its internal, crystalline, atomic nature. What holds a metal together and makes it so strong compared with non-metals? The answer to this question is being discovered bit by bit.

Contrary to popular opinion an extremely interesting experience is a visit to a metals testing laboratory where through powerful machines, metals are tested to destruction by fatigue, by excessive forces and by raised temperature. An almost unbelievable sight is the stress-testing of fabricated structures like aluminum aircraft wings. These objects are constructed as rigidly as steel beams—you would think, but in the flexing machines, hundred-foot wings may be bent through an arc of twenty or thirty degrees! This is more than the wing will ever be called upon to withstand in practice, but technicians must know the limits.

Conversely, the metals intended for rocket work, with the exception of the combustion chamber itself, need not be extraordinarily strong. A rocket, save for its main axis to resist thrust, can be built of a comparatively light skin of metal over a frame, just strong enough to withstand fifteen pounds per square inch of internal atmospheric pressure. It wouldn't fly if it had a skin and frame strong enough to resist meteoric impact—statistics shows it need not bother on that score.

But outside the rocket, metallurgists are creating a world of fantastic metals, capable of resisting almost any known stresses and forces. We are looking into the "metallurgical age."

—John Weston

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"LITTLE RED"

By

OMAR BOOTH



"LILLIPUTIAN COMMIES" does not refer to miniature Marxists or midget communists—it is the trade expression for a series of tiny, miniaturized communication sets and their components which have hit the communication industry—and all electronics—with a bang. The demands of mobility, the necessity to pack vast amounts of television, radio, and electronic equipment into aircraft, into the noses of guided missiles and into the heart of potential space rockets has forced industry to squeeze down things like vacuum tubes, resistors, condensers and transformers until now it is possible to reduce almost any kind of set to almost any dimensions.

All of these operations are laying the groundwork for the future. The first phases of Lunar and interplanetary rocket flight will definitely be limited in terms of capacity and weight. Every ounce, every gram, will count. The pilots and crewmembers will be selected on a weight basis and the chances are that a skeleton will get the job! While it's not quite that bad, the more power and the more equipment you can pack into the rockets, the better chance for survival. So whatever the reasons, at present, for Lilliputian "commies", the future will justify the amount of work and energy put into developing them.

When John Smith, designer for Spaceways Inc. says: "I want a transceiver which fits into eight cubic inches in this space suit, and I want it to have a range of twenty-five miles," he'll get it without any fuss or trouble. High-powered transceivers and television equipment will enable pictures and sound to be sent back to Earth from the Moon. See now, the importance of small-size stuff? No further questions? O. K. Joe, get to work and pack that radar set into that compact!

TOO CLOSE TO NOTHING!

By
WILLIAM
KARNEY

THERE IS a strange bond between nonsense-writers of the Lear-Carroll school and physicists. The nonsense-writers don't mean what they say, and the physicists don't say what they mean! Yet, from both, exceedingly pithy remarks and insights are gained. Do you recall Eddington's famous penchant for quoting "Twas brillig and the slithy toves..." or the equally famous

phrase in s-f, "...the Gostak Distims the Doashes..."? These nonsense words frequently have more meaning than you think they have at a casual glance. But essentially you have to be a physicist-turned-philosopher to really appreciate modern science.

"The hodons and the chronons" is *not* a nonsense phrase, however. It refers to a perfectly valid physical concept, which though it disagrees with our intuition, has a sound foundation in theory. It comes from the efforts of the physicist Heisenberg to describe the ultimate nature of matter. While it is essentially philosophical in nature it still has good physical foundations.

Heisenberg reasoned this way: he and other atomic physicists have come to realize that Nature seems to prefer discontinuities to continuities. For example, the famous "action" or energy constant "h" is found wherever atomic phenomena are being considered. Light manifests itself in terms of discrete particles called "quanta". Matter, too, is discontinuous and discrete—electrons and protons. Perhaps, Heisenberg has suggested in a philosophical mood, Nature has really gone all the way, down to the very fundamental concepts of space and time and "quantized" these too! In other words, perhaps there are such things as the smallest particles of space and the smallest intervals of time!

Whipping out his thinking machine, Heisenberg has calculated the limits of these things and has come up with his now famous "hodons" and "chronons." A "hodon" is the smallest conceivable length!—it is of atomic size, about ten to the minus thirtieth centimeters. Any lengths smaller than this do not exist nor do they have physical meaning. As for time, the minutest interval is the "chronon"—about ten to the minus twenty-fourth of a second! Shorter time intervals are meaningless.

Such a violation of conventional thinking hasn't occurred since Planck proposed the quantum theory. It doesn't make sense to say that there are limits on the subdivisions of length and time. Well, maybe it doesn't make sense, but it certainly has a solid foundation in atomic theory where most common-sense has long since disappeared.

The actual measurement and detection of the hodon and the chronon have not been made. Perhaps they never will be since they are purely theoretical at present. But philosophy calls for the existence of such self-contradictory things—perhaps someday some physicist will devise the means and methods. It has always been a problem to link up the ordinary number system of mathematics—one, two, three etc., with smoothly flowing processes like a falling body or a rotating planet, but the hodon and the chronon point out *one* way to do it. Maybe the whole theory will collapse a "chronon" from now!—or a "hodon" away...

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LET'S HAVE A DRINK!

By LEE OWEN

THE GREATER part of the Earth's surface is water—yet on land, men are crying for water! Definitely, all over the world, even in resource-rich America in areas, there is a distinct water shortage. Vast areas of land are barren desert for lack of water. If only the oceans of the world could be utilized for irrigating the land, we could convert the world into a paradise. Scientists are wracking their minds for a cheap, economical way to change sea-water into fresh-water—or any kind of water suitable for irrigation. The question is—how to get rid of salt!

A short time ago a patent was taken out on a method which strikes anyone immediately as fantastically simple! Practically everybody has done it at one time or another, has had the secret of changing useless sea-water with its leavening of sodium chloride, into another type of water—but failed to recognize it. You'll beat yourself on the head when you reflect on the method which you've certainly done in the chemical lab, at high school, college, or in the basement!

Add silver nitrate to a solution of sodium chloride (which is what sea water is) and you get two new things, a solution of sodium nitrate and an insoluble precipitate of silver chloride! That's all there is to it! Collect—the expensive silver nitrate by setting or filtration and easily reconvert into silver nitrate with nitric acid. The solution of sodium nitrate which results, while not notable, makes a perfect chemical fertilizer as well as irrigator.

Naturally this rosy picture is somewhat modified by technical details. The recovery of the silver chloride, of course, must be almost one hundred per cent, particularly if any volume is involved. Suitable settling and sluicing tanks must be built. But the principles are sound and scientific. The miracle is that no one has thought of this system before.

A nice bonus is also delivered by the process because the precipitate of silver chloride is rich in metals knocked down out of the sea-water. Watch for developments along this line. This simple discovery may change the history of the world!

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